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HE WHO STEALS





"How long has it been since your father wrote you?"

HE WHO STEALS

(COLUI CHE RUBA)

A Story for the Young

BY

ALFREDO BAIOCCO



Translated from the Italian by

WALTER S. CRAMP

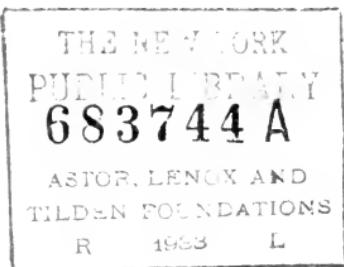
Translator of "Pinocchio"



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ILLUSTRATIONS

"How long has it been since your father wrote you?"

Frontispiece

FACING
PAGE

	PAGE
He left his little brother with neck stretched and mouth open	13
"Tell me, are you really disposed to work?"	23
The boy sobbed with his face in his cap	35
In a corner of the desk under a marble dog there was a package of bills of fifty lire	47
But a country-boy saw all this and pushing aside the women took Nicolo by the arm and dragged him away	53
It sounded like a hundred voices calling out, "Thief —thief!"	61
But the poor woman had fainted	73
"Do you think I'm a thief?"	85
The children began to run behind their mother	91
"The foreman's not here. We only work when he is about"	107
"I feel sure he presented himself in my name"	113
When at sunset the heavens became pale and the workmen went to their houses	127
With powerful force he succeeded in throwing the boy to the ground	133
Mingo could hold back no longer	141

ILLUSTRATIONS

FACING
PAGE

He walked slowly down the hill to the Villa Spadini . . .	153
He lit his pipe and continued, "Yes, you must be lively"	163
Under a tree in the moonlight he saw three men . . .	173
The two rogues, taken by surprise, rushed at him . . .	187
Suddenly two arms encircled her waist and a hand-kerchief closed her mouth	199
He put his hand in his pocket, drew out an envelope and offered it to Mr. Spadini	213
"I shall die without seeing them—I'm going"	223

HE WHO STEALS

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CHAPTER I

UNCLE MARK, with back bent, was pulling up the weeds that were growing in the flower bed of a large garden. He did not reply to the reproofs of the master of the house, Mr. Spadini. He was old and he had learned many things in his long life. Taking his silence as a mute confession of his wrong, Mr. Spadini threw to him half a cigar, saying in a tone that was still a little severe:

“Smoke that without cutting it up for that miserable pipe of yours. Cigars ought to be smoked as cigars.”

Uncle Mark straightened himself and smiled. He looked with suppliant eyes at his master as if to plead for his fifteen year old pipe; but seeing him frowning, he shrugged his shoulders, rubbed his hard

hands on his overalls and picking up the cigar put it delicately in his mouth.

Mr. Spadini threw a match to him, and a little after the two smokers were the most happy men in the world. The proof of it was that the old man, after calling to his son to hurry and to water the flowers, began to talk about the danger of throwing so many good cigars to him.

“Your old gardener,” he said, “loves the Spring but he likes also his pipe. And see! to-day Spring is here. The almond tree is in blossom, the hedges are blooming and the daisies—and the sun—the sun— Ah! if the Spring throws such beautiful things at our feet, we ought to be thankful. And the cigar—how fine this cigar is!”

Mr. Spadini smiled as he played with his pointed beard. He listened a moment to the joyful cries that came from behind the villa and turning on the marble bench asked jokingly of his wife who was reading:

“Well! how is your consumptive doctor?”

“Poor man! his end is near at hand. It is only a question of a few days.”

Uncle Mark hearing this rolled his eyes, looking first at Mr. Spadini and then at his wife. The master assured him:

"We are not talking about dear Doctor Bruni who besides can't cure you of your aches and pains, but about a doctor in the book Mrs. Spadini is reading."

The old man gave a sincere and satisfying "Ah!" and laughed so heartily that even his son began to laugh without knowing why, and the canary-birds on the balcony, who until then had been singing, became quiet.

But the joyful cries that came from behind the villa did not cease.

Mrs. Spadini closed her book and went to look at her son, Gino, who was playing ball with Mingo Grandi.

"Catch it."

"You send them too high, I tell you."

"Look now! Run—"

"Pshaw! I can't."

Gino was not a good ball-player. It was enough for him to run aimlessly about. His cheeks were rosy and he had curly blonde hair which fell over his forehead and which

made one think of the mane of an unbridled pony.

His mother, after soothing his forehead with her hand, asked him to stop playing.

“In tiring oneself these days there is danger of a good cold. Is it true, Mingo, you who are so prudent? Is it true?”

The boy blushed and replied, “Yes’m.”

Old Aunt Rosa, the wife of the gardener, coming out of the villa heard what had been said and she confirmed the counsel of the mother:

“Don’t you remember the bronchitis of last year, Gino?”

The mother remembered it well—how sick Gino had been!

The sun, tired of the first visit of Spring, hid itself in the clouds about the forest and in vain the trees in the garden with trembling branches implored it to come out again.

Mingo, serious and resting on his knees, was tormenting an ant with a twig. Strong-limbed as he was and dressed shabbily, he

appeared like a labourer who worked, occupied only by his work. All day he showed himself disgusted with playing and with games.

"Let's run around in circles," Gino suggested.

"No, let's rest."

"Are you tired?"

"Tired? No."

"Then what's the matter? You used to want to play. What ails you?"

"Nothing."

Gino remained silent, but only a short time.

"How long has it been since your father wrote you? Five months isn't it?"

"Yes."

"Perhaps he is going to return shortly. He's been away two years and he is going to surprise you."

"May be."

"Your mother is well?"

"So, so."

A voice of a woman on a nearby farm was heard singing a popular song.

Gino got up and he left Mingo and went into the villa to speak to his mother.

"Mamma, please talk to Mingo."

"My dear Gino, don't you know that that blessed boy never talks about his misfortunes? I have asked him many times. Tell me, why have you changed? Why doesn't your father write? How is your mother? Do you need anything? He always blushes and replies in monosyllables."

"What can we do?"

"Gino, with temperaments like these, we must be prudent. To insist too much always finishes by irritating them. And if he doesn't come here any more to play with you—"

"What then?"

"To make you contented, I have thought of one thing. I have some fine laces I want cleaned. With an excuse of wishing some one careful and exact I shall send Rosa to call Mingo's mother, Marianna, and surely from her we shall know that which dear Mingo doesn't want to tell us. Now call him to come inside."

And Gino, going to the window, cried:
“Illustrious Mingo Grandi, dinner is
served.”

CHAPTER II

IN one of the wretched houses of Collefiore Mingo Grandi lived with his mother, Marianna, the laundress, and his little brother Ciccillo. There was only one room, dark, cold and miserable.

When Beppe the father left for America full of hopes for himself and of promises for his wife and boys, the family left their two comfortable rooms in Collefiore and chose this miserable room. They hoped to be able to live there with part of the savings that Beppe sent and with the little money gained by the work of Marianna's strong arms.

But, after a year, Beppe did not write any more. His fellow-countrymen who returned from America could not reply exactly to the anxious questions of Marianna.

"We saw him once," they said, "and a second time, and after that no more. Per-

haps he is ill. Perhaps he is working on a railroad in the far West. You give him time and he will write. In America, there is so much work that the days fly by like our hours here. Don't worry. No doubt he is more anxious about you than you are about him."

And as no more money came from America Marianna redoubled her efforts. But one day, exhausted by fatigue, crushed with grief at no news from her husband, she had to go to bed, sick with asthma, and there was danger of her life.

Mingo had been going to the Villa Spadini for nearly five years. Gino met him first at school and liked him at once because Mingo was short and strong-limbed like a little bull. It was the love that the weak feel for the strong. When an older boy threw a stone at Gino, Mingo fought with him and gave him a sound thrashing. From that day Gino loved him like a brother and wanted him always at the villa, notwithstanding the unwillingness of his aristocratic father.

Poor Mingo was also devoted to Gino and every Thursday and Sunday he went to the Villa Spadini to play, though he did not feel at ease in such a large villa and Mr. Spadini's frown was not such as to encourage these visits.

But now it really was a sacrifice for him to go to the villa, because while there he had to hide the grief that saddened his soul.

That day he went home with slow steps and bent head complaining to himself.

His brother was waiting for him at the door and called:

“Hurry up—mother wants you.”

“Am I late?” Mingo asked as he entered.

“Oh, it does not matter,” replied a weak voice. And then quickly, “What have you been doing to-day?”

The boy did not reply to that question which his mother always asked, when he returned from the Villa Spadini. And the mother did not repeat it.

“Are you hungry, Mamma?”

“Not very.”

Mingo knelt before the little fire-place,

broke a few twigs and placed them on some dry leaves. Then he set fire to them.

But the fire burned slowly because he did not stir the leaves. He was irritated, nearly angry with himself.

He was angry with himself because he was not able to make more than ten cents a day by carrying bundles of twigs from the forest and because that day he had not worked and he had left his mother alone and had gone to play. He had thought of her while he was playing. Yes, but why did he not work instead of play?

The little brother whined, because instead of thin slices of corn-bread, he wanted white bread like his mother's, and Mingo, who remembered that he was not able to take anything from the table at the Villa Spadini, threatened him with open hand and a surly look. Then he placed a pan on the fire, taking care that no smoke would reach his mother, and began to cut small slices of bread.

"I am a boy without a heart," he said to himself, "yes, without a heart. Why didn't

I work to-day? Why don't I search work so that Mamma and Cicillo can eat what they want?"

When he carried the steaming plate to his mother she caressed his little ruffled head and said:

"My poor little thing!"

These tender words, were they a reproof to him? Had he become rude, and bad? He thought so. But why?

He left his little brother with neck stretched and mouth open to divide the little soup and he went and leaned against the doorway.

It was now becoming dark and the light that came from the windows opposite seemed as if it were being swallowed up by sombre shadows. And Mingo thought:

"I can't play any more with Gino as I used to. Does Gino know that my mother is wasting away day by day because there is not nourishing food for her? Does Gino know that she never sleeps, tortured by the asthma which seems to suffocate her from one moment to another? Ah! Gino



He left his little brother with neck stretched and mouth open.

has never seen his mother panting in bed and he never said to himself with agony in his soul, She is dying, she cannot live the night through! Does Gino know that Ciccillo does not have enough to eat, and that Nicolo, the cart driver, the man who owns this miserable room, asks me in a loud voice when he meets me for the two months rent that is owed him?—No, I can't, I mustn't play any more."

He looked at a house on a hill and he saw light from the two small windows. And he seemed to see as through a lens the small kitchen of that house in which he had lived when his father was with them. He seemed to see his mother well and strong preparing the evening meal, stirring the soup in a large copper kettle while in a pan nearby meat was cooking.

How everything had changed! The home was not like it was. The copper kettle which shone like gold had been sold. The father had not written for five months and the gossips spoke badly about him.

"Perhaps he has written," thought Mingo,

"and the letters have gone astray. Perhaps he is sick. Does he know that I must alone work for all? But I am only twelve years old and all I am good for is to play."

If some one would have said to him, "Mingo, I shall give you work but you must work like a mule, you must break your back, you must sweat blood from morning till night," oh, Mingo would have accepted at once.

"I must look for work, I must look for work," he said to himself clenching his fists. "I have not been a good boy, and yes, perhaps I have no heart."

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Mingo was not just with himself. Had he not looked about every day to earn more money? Had he not gone to the forest from morning to night to gather dried twigs, and when he returned did he not sweat under the weight, did not his back ache? And what could he do more? But he was discontented. That which tortured the boy was the continual struggle that took place

in his soul. The duty of a son for a mother who was pining away was to submit to any humiliating act to aid her—but the little man was ashamed to beg. If he had spoken of the suffering and of the miserable conditions in his home to Gino's mother, she would have immediately given him money and food, but this was repugnant to this little man.

However, must his mother die little by little on account of his pride?

One morning, in the forest, thinking over the words of his mother, who advised him to change his mind and go to the Villa Spadini and play with Gino, he finally decided to go. Selling his bundle of dried twigs in the square, he went to the villa carrying a little present of some strawberries, the fruit that Gino's mother liked the best.

But, under the high edge of the boxwood, Uncle Mark stopped him and asked him for news about his father, and then the old man spoke so well of him because he knew Beppe as a boy and young man that Mingo felt a swelling in his heart.

"Yes, he was a fine man," said Uncle Mark. "But if he doesn't send money, you can make it. You are not a baby and at your age your father worked hard with us men. And I have also worked since I was a boy. I was eight years old when my father said to me, 'If you want bread, you must work for it.' I've worked every day since, even Sundays, always singing. I'm old now but I work and I still sing as I work, and, my boy, I have never begged a cent from any one."

It seemed to Mingo that those words were meant for him as if the old man had read his thoughts. He did not look for Gino, and leaving the strawberries with Uncle Mark he went back to the forest and began again to make bundles of dead twigs.

The day after he thought he would try to find work that would pay him better.

The Spring which had tinted the gardens along the street and had covered the almond trees with a white veil, poured into his soul a new faith in himself.

For several days he went from place to

place. The bricklayers offered him ten cents a day for ten hours' work. The post office did not want messenger boys. On the farm they did not want boys. Finally the sexton of the church said that he would give him something to do, but for two days only, and he would pay him eight cents.

Tired and discouraged, with heart crushed and tormented with want and ashamed to beg, one day he knocked at the door of Don Salvatore, the old priest who said mass in the small church called Grazie.

Don Salvatore opened the door himself. He was tall and thin and his robe showed signs of wear. He was a strange kind of priest was this Don Salvatore; a son of country people who were half-ruined in giving him an education. But he always remembered his family with tender love and he loved the country and his little piece of land near his small house. He had refused a much higher position and he never repented of that decision. Old and alone, he lived a really miserable life but he was glad to divide his days between the church, his

canary-birds, the plants of his garden, his books, and the people who wanted his advice.

He was not surprised to see Mingo. He raised his head so as to look through his spectacles which were always on the point of his nose. He greeted him with a smile, and after Mingo had entered he began to clean a bird-cage.

"It's dirty and old and I really must make a new one," he said to Mingo.

"Are you going to do that yourself, Don Salvatore?"

"Why not?"

He went to the window slightly dragging his feet and leaning outside put the bird-cage on the wall. The large almond-tree was in blossom and Don Salvatore looked at it with a smile of satisfaction. Then returning he called the boy with a gesture to sit down.

"What do you want?" he asked.

Mingo wanted to speak openly, to tell about the misery at home and the necessary things that he must have for his sick mother.

But, as always, he was ashamed and he said very little.

Perhaps, however, Don Salvatore understood more than the boy said because he lowered his eyes thoughtfully, then he raised his head, frowned and looked towards the window.

"It is too far away," he said.

"What's too far away?" asked Mingo.

"At Rivochiaro they are making three new arches for a bridge that was ruined some years ago. The work is being directed by the engineer Cogliati assisted by his son who also is an engineer. The father is one of my dearest friends. We went to college together. I could recommend you to him, but Rivochiaro is far away and your mother wants you near her."

Don Salvatore got up, went to the window, straightened the bird-cage and then returned and sat down.

"Ah, yes! It is not easy to find remunerative work here—but it is not impossible. You are a good boy and God does not abandon good boys. Your mother is a saint and

your father was a man of honor. America has ruined quite a few of our people. I have thought—if I should speak to some charitable person—”

“But I don’t want to beg for money,” interrupted Mingo quickly.

Don Salvatore expected this protest, but not so vigorous, and he stretched out his hand to calm Mingo. He looked at him over his spectacles, smiled and said:

“To trust too much in others is slothful. To refuse aid when there is absolute need of it is to show too much pride. God condemns both sloth and pride. I do not ask you to beg, on the contrary I shall help you to seek work. But if you do not succeed you have the right of the aid of those to whom God has given riches because they are able to relieve the miseries of their brother men. But before holding out your hand to beg— Tell me, are you really disposed to work?”

“Yes, yes,” the boy replied energetically.

“Well,” continued the priest, affected and moved, “let us hope we shall find work.



"Tell me, are you really disposed to work?"

And if we do not find it, if it is impossible to find it, we shall hold out our hand for you, for your mother and for your little brother—and it will not be a cause for shame. Don Salvatore says it, who is poor like you. Have you faith in Don Salvatore?"

"Oh, yes!" cried out Mingo, and he took the priest's hand and kissed it.

Don Salvatore got up and with a trembling voice said:

"Now go, and have faith in God who sees you and loves you."

After the boy had gone the priest went to the window, looked intensely towards heaven, and falling upon his knees rested his forehead on the windowsill. And he remained there some time, his hands clasped. The white flowers of the almond tree shining in the sun as a background to his white head looked like a halo.

CHAPTER III

SOME weeks passed. Marianna, after having tried in vain to persuade her son to tell the Spadinis of their miserable condition, began to study a certain plan of action. Not only for herself, but for the boys, "for Mingo, who wore himself out working in the forest and who became every day more pensive and sad because he was not able—his heart felt it—to help his mother more than he was doing.

That boy, always eager and ready for her and for his little brother, obliging to everybody, had now from time to time shown irritation and bad humour towards his brother and, yes, towards her. He spoke in a sad strain or he had strange silent moments, and he was headstrong in disobedience. The poor mother could not see this change without suffering.

One morning he did not want to help a

woman in the neighbourhood although his mother requested it, and she was surprised when he said:

“But people like them, Mamma, never pay anything!”

Marianna then began to think of a way she could inform Mrs. Spadini without Mingo’s knowing about it. Anyway the boy would not be grieved because she had not the intention of asking for charity. She was a worthy laundress, everybody knew that, and she had worked hard. Would not Mrs. Spadini lend her a little money, and when she became well she could pay it back in work?

Her cousin Nina would carry the message to Mrs. Spadini and when Mingo had gone to the forest she sent Cicillo saying, “When you see Nina alone, tell her to come here as I wish to speak to her. But do not stop on the way. If you return quickly I shall give you a piece of my white bread.”

Nina was not at home that day and Cicillo returned late because he met two boys in the street who were playing with a large

rubber ball. Anyway he took a piece of white bread.

The day after Marianna tried once more.

Mingo returned that day from the forest more gloomy than usual.

He had met Nicolo the cart-driver, who in anger and with vile words abused Mingo's father, and he threatened to turn Marianna, Cicillo and Mingo out of the house if the rent was not paid in a few days.

Now he felt in his heart something that he had never felt before. It was hatred, but against whom he could not say.

His mother wanted him to go and play with Gino Spadini.

Ah, no! How could he play with the threat of Nicolo in his heart? with the remorse of not having garnered enough that day to buy lard for his mother's meal?

An egg, that was all he could give her that day. With an egg his mother must regain her health while Dr. Bruni, every time that he came to see her, pressed his lips and shrugged his shoulders and would say:

“She must have meat, eggs and milk.”

And today, tomorrow and the day after—nothing nourishing to eat.

“Has the doctor come today, Mamma?”

“No, Mingo.”

“He wasn’t here yesterday—why! he hasn’t been here for three days!”

Suddenly a frightful question passed through his mind:

“Doesn’t he come because he sees there is no more hope for her?”

CHAPTER IV

DOCTOR BRUNI was taking his dinner. Between the tough chicken and his servant Giovanna, who was tougher than the chicken, he was fast losing his temper. He often did that and it was not hard for him to do so.

“Stella has fever, I know it,” snapped Giovanna.

“I have already told you twice, yes twice, that she has nothing but a little indigestion. It is not serious and I won’t tell you what she has. We doctors have our secrets and we don’t tell them to talkers like you, nor even to judges—”

The image of judges did not silence Giovanna, who would be able to keep her head even before a squadron of police.

“What do you mean by saying she has fever?” cried the doctor.

“Nothing, nothing, ab-so-lute-ly nothing. But if she has fever?”

"Who told you she had fever?" yelled the doctor, beating the table with his fist as if it were the head of Giovanna. "Who told you that?"

The old servant who had worked for her master for twenty years was about to reply in a voice equally loud and with anger equally strong, when two taps were heard on the street door and the river of words that tickled her throat was dammed up.

It was extraordinary the transformation that took place in the jovial visage of the doctor when he became angry. His large, rosy and laughing face all shining, his little, kind and good eyes, his large mouth just made for hearty laughter—in a second all was changed. His eyes hid themselves under his bristly lashes and his face became a mass of wrinkles, the largest of which was about his firmly pressed lips.

It was not easy to look at him then without laughing, not a respectable laugh either for him who held in his hand the health of Collefiore.

The doctor and the servant looked en-

quiringly at one another, he with the leg of the tough chicken between his plate and his mouth, she with bosom extended and with hands on her hips.

“Who can it be at this hour?” she asked.

“Ah—h—h!” cried the doctor nearly beside himself and mimicking the voice of Giovanna. “Who can it be at this hour? I’ll tell you who it is. It is someone who comes to call me, to take me dear knows where, at this hour, without giving me even time to swallow a mouthful. Ah! Cursed be the day when I chose this infamous business. I’m a servant of servants, that’s what I am —servant of servants.”

“No. It’s the father of Stella. I know it. Her fever—”

“Wretch!” thundered the doctor. “Open the door. Open the door.”

She whined as she drew the bolt and a timid voice was heard, “Good evening Aunt Giovanna.”

The doctor recognised the voice of the son of the laundress and he gave a sigh of relief.

"Is your mother worse?" he asked of Mingo who stood straight with his cap in his hands. "No, you didn't come to call me because your mother was a little better the last time I saw her. Still she suffers very much, very much."

The doctor lowered his head, placed the chicken leg on the plate, cleaned his lips with his napkin and took a sip of water. His face was impassive and Mingo, though he looked at him attentively, could not read anything in it whether favourable or unfavourable.

He was not a man without heart: angry, furious, rude, wordy, yes—but bad, no. He could never pardon the poor for their bad taste in getting sick. To him sickness was only for the rich. And if, in spite of his peculiar ideas, the poor became ill, he redoubled his efforts in curing them.

"Tell me, doctor, tell me, Mamma is very sick, she will not recover, she—"

"And why must I tell you that? That's fine, that is!"

Mingo stood there with eyes and mouth

wide open. Extending his arms he asked in a thread of a voice, "Won't she get well? Is she going to die?"

The doctor feared that the boy was going to fall at his feet, and he screamed like a crazy man:

"Who told you she was going to die? Oh! what ignorance. Oh, what ignorance! I have told you that your mother was sick, very sick, and why is she so sick? Because she caught bronchitis two years ago. Why did she go to work as a laundress? Ah! Asthma, asthma—but that is a sickness only for the rich, because the cure is expensive and you are poor, very poor, and your mother has only a piece of bread—do you understand?"

The boy sobbed with his face hidden in his cap, although he tried to force back his tears.

Giovanna went to him and shaking him by the shoulders, said, "Did you come here to cry and worry us?"

"You keep quiet," the doctor said to her. Looking at Mingo he said, "Yes, your



The boy sobbed with his face hidden in his cap.

mother is sick, and if there is no money for nourishing things—” But he did not continue on that strain.

“Here at Collefiore there are people who swim in money, they squander it, and they throw it right and left. And your poor mother with two boys, and she being ill—”

The sobs of Mingo were now louder.

“But,” continued the Doctor, “there is no danger at present. The danger is that the body not nourished sufficiently, wears out quickly. To get well requires money, nothing else. There are those who not knowing what to do with it, throw it away in silly things. One hundred lire? Two hundred lire? What is that to them? They are crazy. And there are others who die because they have not one lira! Yes, they are wicked, downright wicked.”

The Doctor became silent. He thought he had said too much. He took up the leg of the tough chicken and began to bite at the meat with great care.

Mingo did not cry any more, but he held his head low. When he heard the large

shoes of Giovanna scraping on the floor, which meant that she was coming into the room, he raised his head and said with a strong voice:

“Very well, Doctor, you will come tomorrow.”

The Doctor looked at him for a moment and replied:

“Why, of course I will come tomorrow.”

“Good night, Doctor.”

“Good night, Mingo.”

CHAPTER V

WHEN Rosa, Mrs. Spadini's servant, returned from the dark and cold home of Marianna, she told her mistress what she had seen and what the poor sick woman had said. And now, while Mrs. Spadini walked up and down the room exclaiming, "Dear me! dear me! and to think I knew nothing—and that strange boy never opened his mouth and always said that things were all right," Rosa followed her gesticulating and exclaiming, "You ought to see for yourself—dear me!—three mouths—three mouths to feed—they are dying of hunger—God help them!"

"Now listen, Rosa," said Mrs. Spadini, standing still, "what we have not done we shall do. Today I shall prepare a basket and tomorrow when Mingo is not home you shall carry it to Marianna. The boy has not spoken because he was ashamed to

beg. We must not humiliate him. I beg you to be on your guard and not talk too much."

"Oh! Mrs. Spadini. Do you think I am a tell-tale? Oh, no! I'm not that."

"Very well, very well—tomorrow then."

The day after at Collefiore was a holiday and it was not a suitable day to send the basket. But Mrs. Spadini did not want to wait any longer. She invented a story like this: M. Spadini had received from Mingo's father a letter like many that had been sent intrusting Mr. Spadini with money sufficient to help the family. In this case Mingo could not refuse. Mrs. Spadini did not feel very well that morning, so she went to church with Gino so as to see Mingo or someone who could go to him and invite him to the villa.

Mingo was in church.

The night before he had suffered terribly. His mother slept better than usual, but his heart troubled him and all through the night he was only half asleep. At one time he half-dreamed that his mother was dead and

he cried, but in his half conscious state he cried with his mouth pressed on the cushion. The words of the doctor burned in his memory and they gave him bad thoughts, and they gave him also a kind of wish to be revenged. Upon whom, he could not say. In the morning his sad thoughts had vanished but there remained in his heart a strong grief and a desire to cry.

In the church he sought a place behind a column. He tried to pray but he could not find the words. While the priest sang the litany he looked over the people, young country boys with shining hair, old men who responded mechanically to the service, women with handkerchiefs on their heads; and he looked at the place where his mother used to sit.

He remembered his mother's admonition to go to church and try to find comfort in prayer, but as he was about to try once more he saw Mrs. Spadini and Gino, and the prayer died again on his lips.

He thought of their house. He saw richness everywhere in the furnishing, in the

clothes. He saw lots of food. He saw health, games and happiness.

“Why,” he said to himself, “it would be enough to keep Mamma alive if we had only one chair of that villa. That silver dog would keep us a year, and that album with the gold clasp—”

Service was over and he did not know it. But as he left the church he met Gino and Mrs. Spadini at the door. He wanted to go back but the boy had seen him and had called him:

“Won’t you come to-day?”

“Yes,” Mingo replied, “I shall come.”

“Really? Tell him, Mamma, to come.”

“Yes, Mingo, you must come,” she said in a caressing voice. “Why don’t you come any more? We all love you, Mingo, and Gino loves you most of all. Will you come?”

“Yes, Mrs. Spadini.”

“Fine! You must not forget your friends.”

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And Mingo went to the Villa Spadini.

He did not have to ring the bell, for Gino who was waiting for him saw him coming, and ran joyfully to meet him.

They mounted the stairway arm in arm to the play-room. Gino was more friendly than usual. He even repeated what he heard his father say the night before about a certain electric mill that he was going to build.

"Papa said that I must not say a word about this but I can tell you everything."

They sat down upon the floor as they usually did. Mingo hooked the train of cars together while Gino laid the tracks. But Mingo was inattentive.

His friend was anxious for him to play, and, fearing from time to time that Mingo would go away, took from the shelf all his playthings. There were many expensive things and he began to talk about them.

"Look at this top. It has a long spring that makes it go for three minutes. Don't you believe it? I've tried it with my watch. And this little boat! If you could only see how it goes through the water! Mamma

gave me that, the last time I was sick, so that I would take the medicine—bah! what bad stuff that was! What do you think these cost all together, Mingo?"

"I do not know."

"More than a hundred lire, sure."

"More than a hundred lire?"

Gino did not think in talking like that he was cruel and that he hurt his friend. However, Mingo tried not to show what he felt, and he lowered his head and began again to hook the cars together.

But what was Gino going to do now?

"Wait a moment," he said. "Behind a chest in the garret there ought to be other tracks and another train. I remember very well there is a locomotive with a bell. I'll run and see. If they are like the tracks here we shall have enough to go from Europe to Asia. Asia will be in Papa's study. Of course we are not allowed to play there, but Papa is away. Then I would like to see who can stop a locomotive in full speed."

And he went away puffing like an engine. Mingo was disgusted at having to stay

there longer. He sat there with his legs under him and looked at the train of cars. He pushed them away.

"More than a hundred lire," he said to himself. "More than a hundred lire for things that are not used, and if he wants another hundred lire he could get it. And I, I want to earn only a few lire to save my mother who is dying, and I can't do it."

He got up.

"What am I doing here?" he said to himself. "I want to go to Mamma. I want to go away."

In the meantime, Gino instead of going to the garret went to his mother to learn if Rosa had carried the basket to Mingo's mother.

But Mrs. Spadini was in the parlor entertaining visitors who had come from a villa some miles away.

And though the maid tried to prevent Gino from speaking to his mother he called to her.

"Now don't scold, Mamma, but I want to know what Mingo's mother said."

"Really, Gino, I have not sent Rosa as yet with the basket, because I am busy entertaining these guests. I shall send it to her tomorrow."

"Tomorrow! But tomorrow Mingo will be at home."

"I shall find a way."

"But—"

"Listen, Gino, I haven't time to explain now. Don't worry me. I have a headache. But tomorrow, you will see. I have already thought how we can help them."

"How?"

"I shall tell you this evening."

Gino went back to his friend and pulling him by the arm said, "I can't find things alone. You come with me."

* * *

The new tracks were soon laid. They started from the play-room and entered Mr. Spadini's study. They passed under the desk and returned from where they started.

The spring of the locomotive was wound up and the train began to move. It en-



In a corner of the desk under a marble dog there was a package of bills of fifty lire.

tered the study quickly but stopped suddenly at the desk.

“That station is not on the time-table!” Gino cried, scolding the imaginary engineer, and he stooped down to see what had happened. Mingo leaned against the desk and tried to think of an excuse for going away. He looked at the large inkstand, the silver paperweight and the box of postage stamps. Then he gave a little cry:

“Oh! Oh!”

“What is it?” asked Gino getting up quickly.

In a corner of the desk under a marble dog there was a package of bills of fifty lire.

“That’s nothing,” Gino said. “Papa has lots of them in his safe in the bedroom. Did you ever see a bill of a thousand lire? They are large—like that—just like a handkerchief.”

Mingo did not hear him, so fixed was his mind on that pile of bills. Gino also looked at them for a moment, and then he started the train again.

The game began, but the eye of Mingo continually saw the marble dog and the money under it.

CHAPTER VI

IT was late when Mingo left the Villa Spadini and even then he did not hurry home. He really seemed afraid. He was miserable at his misfortune, a misfortune that was stronger than he.

In his heart there were a thousand thoughts that disturbed him. Above all there was a desire to possess the money he saw on Mr. Spadini's desk, and he felt a hatred against the man who possessed that sum.

Yes, yes, he hated Gino, Mrs. Spadini, and Mr. Spadini, and he thought of that without fear, in fact he felt a relief in his hatred. He actually hated them, their wealth, their happiness in all that they had.

There was a strong warm wind that evening that blew clouds of dust in his face. The sky was as if it were on fire and large clouds covered the mountains far away.

On the street that led to his house he met two young men who called to him:

“Don’t go home, be careful.”

That made Mingo go more quickly and when he reached the door he saw Nicolo the cart driver. He had been drinking and he was talking aloud and making menacing gestures.

Mingo trembled and for a moment his eyes did not see. He thought of running away, of hiding himself—but only for a moment.

Quickly he became master of himself. He rushed into the house. He saw his mother with arms upraised praying. He found a stick and going to the door said:

“You, go away. If you don’t I shall hit you.”

But Nicolo cried out, “I want my money. Two months’ rent—see? And I’m going to have it.”

Then Mingo called back: “Very well, tomorrow, tomorrow early I’ll bring the rent. Now go away. Go away!”

The neighbours hearing the confusion



But a country-boy saw all this and pushing aside the women took Nicolo by the arm and dragged him away.



came out of their houses. But a country-boy saw all this and pushing aside the women took Nicolo by the arm and dragged him away, while the cart-driver continually cried out, "I want my money—two months' rent—I want my money!"

Mingo re-entered the house pale, with legs trembling, with all his body weak from his exertion. He threw himself on his bed groaning, with his hands through his hair. He would have liked to scream, to scream out loud, but he felt something in his throat that choked him. His little brother was crying but Mingo did not hear him. He only heard the faint groans of his mother. As if, only at that moment, he understood that she was suffering, he ran to her bed and burying his face on her breast sobbed nervously.

Marianna could not speak. She raised her thin hands to her throat as if to open it and let the air enter. One moment, and with a faint cry her head fell back upon the pillow. Mingo pulled himself together, he got up and passing his arm under her back

relieved her a little. Then he looked at her with fixed eyes, with his lower lip between his teeth. From that long intense glance he became transfigured. He was no longer himself. His eyes flashed and on his mouth there was a strange brutal grimace.

A little after with the excuse that he had to see someone about work he went out, locked the door from the outside, and started to run to the Villa Spadini.

His heart beat like a hammer. He felt as if a band of iron was pressing on his forehead, his temples, and the back of his neck. A slight noise like the whirring of wings from behind a hedge startled him. He became afraid, but clenching his fists he ran faster and he did not stop until he reached the Villa trembling and out of breath.

He wanted to speak immediately at whatever cost to Mrs. Spadini. He had been stupid not to confide in her before.

As he entered the grounds he heard the voices of Gino and Mr. Spadini. They were in the gardener's house. He listened for the voice of Mrs. Spadini but he did not

hear it. Perhaps as was her custom she was in her room reading.

He mounted the steps and through the open door he heard the noise of plates being washed in the kitchen. He put his head inside and asked permission to enter, but no one replied. He went inside and opened the door of Mr. Spadini's study. It was dark but a little light came from the hall. Thinking Mrs. Spadini was in the next room he asked permission again to enter. There was no reply.

He called: "Mrs. Spadini. Mrs. Spadini."

Again there was no reply. He was surprised, and he was about to leave the study when his eyes saw the white marble dog guarding the package of bills.

At the same time he heard the voice of Mrs. Spadini who was speaking to the servants in the kitchen. A horrible idea came to him, it mastered him. In order to liberate himself from it he shook his head and ran out into the hall calling Mrs. Spadini. But the voices were heard no longer from

the kitchen. Mrs. Spadini had gone up by the back stairs to bed. How could he talk to her now? And he had promised to pay the cart-driver tomorrow morning.

The horrible idea again possessed him: "Take only one bill, not for yourself but for your mother."

A cold sweat dampened his forehead. His legs would not obey. He wanted to run away but he could not and he leaned against the wall. All at once he heard loud laughter which came from the gardener's house.

"They are laughing," he said to himself. "They are happy and my mother is dying and tomorrow she is going to be put out of the house!"

A flood of bitterness mounted in his head, it burned his face and nearly blinded him; and under the influence of hate he clenched his fists as if to defend himself from someone. As quick as lightning he was at the desk. The voice repeated, "For your mother." He seized some of the bills and rushed out of the room, out of the villa,

with fists clenched and eyes half seeing.

Mingo ran like an assassin being pursued.

* * *

An hour after he left his home. He closed the door, locked it, taking care not to make a noise, and he pushed the key inside in the space between the door and the ground. The night was cold.

He went down the hill towards the creek. The path was steep and he slipped, and fell wounding his hands in the bushes. But he gritted his teeth, got up and started on again.

When he was in the narrow valley and just as he was about to ford the creek, a dog hearing him began to bark. It awakened others and there was a din in Mingo's ears, but the barking ceased and Mingo went on his way. He avoided the carriage road on the other side and he climbed up the stony hill without a moment of breathing time. He was not tired, he was not afraid. His excited condition sustained him and it did not allow him to think of the cold that was becoming more severe all the time. His

pulse beat strong, his temples pained him, his face was burning but he went running up the steep ascent, slipping, falling, but never complaining. He was not a boy who was fleeing, he was a man who ran to an assault.

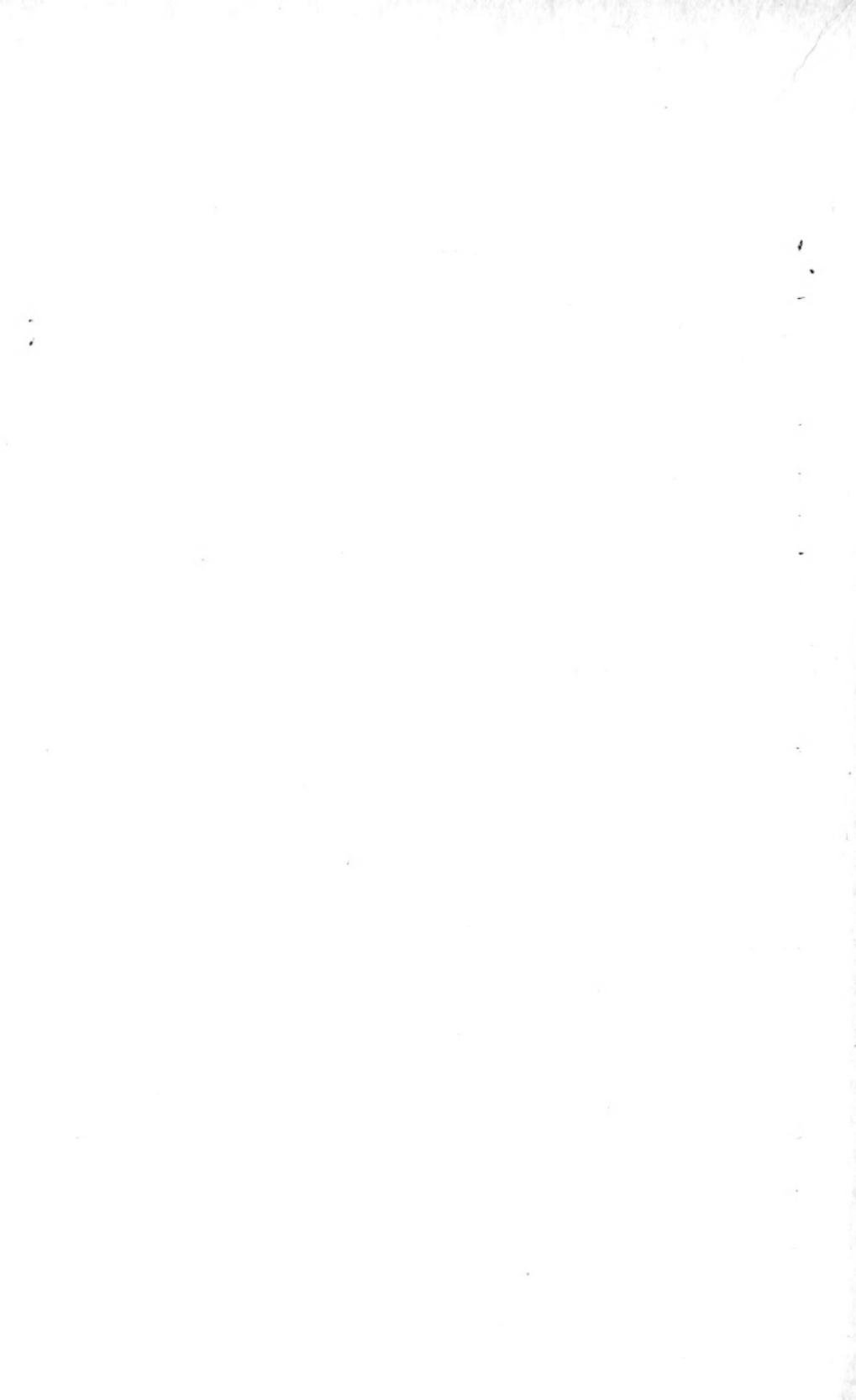
He felt in his heart a terrible hatred against whom he could not say. Perhaps it was against those who refused him work, perhaps it was against Nicolo the cart-driver, perhaps it was against Mr. Spadini, and he cursed with disconnected words, cut short by his lack of breath.

When he reached level ground he was able to talk to himself.

"I wanted to work," he said, "I begged for work, but you did not want me—you drank, you drank too much and then you demanded the rent and we did not have bread, and Mamma was dying. Why? Why have you so much money and we nothing? Why have you ten times, a hundred times, a thousand times more than you need and we have not a penny? Ah! You laugh—but I have the courage to—"



It sounded like a hundred voices calling out, "Thief—thief!"



It seemed to him that he heard from behind his shoulders a loud laughing voice, and he shivered.

“You are running away because you are a thief,” it seemed to say.

He turned quickly round. He heard a buzzing in his ears and it sounded like a hundred voices calling out, “Thief—thief!”

He shook his head, raised his brow to the cold wind which hissed through the trees, he pressed his temples and cried in a strangling voice:

“Thief? Who calls me a thief? Who said that? I, a thief? I did that for my mother—I did it because she was dying—”

He tried to picture his mother well and happy. But what came to him was a mother sad, tormented and crushed.

He became afraid of that picture. He heard again the buzzing in his ears. His mind could hold no thought for any length of time. Something seemed to press his heart, his throat nearly closed, and with a groan he fell upon his knees, then face downwards upon the path.

CHAPTER VII

MR. SPADINI and Gino were amused more than usually in the gardener's house that night with Uncle Mark. That sympathetic, vigorous old man knew many stories, old and new, and he told them willingly, especially if Mr. Spadini did not forget to give him tobacco for his pipe.

Sometimes Mr. Spadini preferred to talk of work, of agricultural improvement, of fertilizers, of chemicals and—woe to the gardener if he dared to argue with him. Then he never tried and he never noticed the yawns of the old man and his wife and son.

That evening Mr. Spadini did most of the talking, but he soon stopped and he left and entered the Villa with Gino. Before going to bed he remembered the twenty bills of fifty lire which he had received that morning and which he had left on his desk

in a hurry to keep an appointment with an engineer for the new electric mill.

A surprise came to him when he entered his study and counted over the money. There were eighteen and he remembered very well that he had left twenty there. He counted them again, and then once more taking them one by one between his thumb and first finger—eighteen!

He went to the bedroom and called Mrs. Spadini and Gino. They said that they had seen them but had not touched them.

"Well! we must wake up the servants," he said.

"Before asking them," advised his wife, "it is better for you to use your own memory a little. Another time when money was missing you always remembered that you had taken it yourself. The servants here have never stolen a penny."

Mr. Spadini, although he was sure that he had left twenty bills on his desk was unwillingly persuaded and he went to bed in a bad temper.

The next morning while he was dressing

he spoke again of the two bills that had mysteriously disappeared.

“You understand,” he said to his wife, “I can afford to lose one hundred lire but I want to know who in my house steals.”

He spoke so loud that his voice reached the kitchen, and the servants who even trembled before their master when he was in good humor now were frightened because they thought that the loss would fall upon them.

“You are right, yes, you are right,” said Mrs. Spadini. “It’s very strange.”

“Strange? Why, it is shameful.”

“The servants are honest and you know that as well as I.”

“Yes, I like them, and I shall like them until I have a reason not to like them.”

“Yesterday there were no visitors except Mingo who came to play with Gino.”

“Mingo?” asked the husband turning quickly. “Did he go into my study?”

“Yes, Gino told me that he and Mingo played there,” Mrs. Spadini replied trying to force a smile.

“What is all this?” growled Mr. Spadini. “Has my study become a play-room? How many times have I said that my study is private and no one—no one can enter it—and that boy—ah! But I’ll teach that kid. I’ll beat him—I’ll beat him—”

He went to the looking glass but he could not make a knot in his tie. Mrs. Spadini saw his difficulty but did not go to help him.

“Did that kid see those bills?” he asked.

“Yes, Mingo saw them and he was surprised.”

“Then there is no doubt at all—he is a thief.”

“Oh!” exclaimed Mrs. Spadini. “What are you saying? Gino was with him the whole time.”

“Well! there is only one way out of this. Either Mingo stole the money or the servants. And that Mingo, who comes from the poor quarter—you make a friend of him and so does Gino.”

“Don’t say anything against Mingo. He is a good boy.”

“I say this,” said Mr. Spadini raising his

voice, "no thief or robber can stay in my house. I say it again and again."

After a breakfast eaten in silence Mrs. Spadini went to the piano and struck a few chords, while Gino still pouting under his father's rebuke, was at the window with his cheek resting on his open hand, looking at the jet of water which was playing in the fountain. Mr. Spadini seated at the table was reading, or at least he feigned that he was reading, the morning paper.

The notes from the piano came out timid and uncertain. Mrs. Spadini got up, closed the lid, and turning to her husband asked for the latest news.

"Nothing new," was the reply she received in a dry tone.

The silence was broken by the maid who entered and said that a poor woman desired to speak to Mrs. Spadini.

When the name of the woman was given the father, mother and son looked questioningly at one another and they went quickly to the door.

Mingo, leaving home, did not notice that his mother was gasping in her sleep with light, irregular wheezing.

A little after he had left, the poor woman awoke and sat up in bed. It seemed to her that she was suffocating. She called Mingo in a low voice to light the candle. She did not receive a reply but she did not insist because he would have to get up at dawn so as to go to the forest. She fell back a prey to painful thoughts and horrible presentiments which had tormented her while asleep. She felt that she was near her end, and thinking of her two boys alone, all alone, she sobbed a long time. When a glimmer of light entered under the door she became drowsy and closing her eyes slept until late. She was awakened by Cicillo, who was hungry and wanted a piece of bread. Mingo was not there.

“He has already gone to the forest,” she thought, and she told Cicillo to get the bread from the cupboard.

The little boy slipped from his bed and

stopped at the table to look at a closed envelope.

"It can't be a letter," said the mother.
"It's only an envelope."

The boy took it up and showed it to her.
It was really a letter.

"Mingo has written to Gino," she said.
"Put it down, you are dirtying it."

But the mother a little later became restless and disturbed. Why did Mingo write a letter when he could have sent his brother with a verbal message?

"Bring the letter to me," she said.

When it was handed to her she tore it open and read:

"Dear Mamma,

I am going to work far away from Collefiori.
Don't cry. I am enclosing one hundred lire so as
to pay the rent and to buy milk, eggs and meat. I
will send you more just as soon as I find a position.

Don't cry for I am no longer a baby.

Buy medicines for your asthma. Kiss brother.
Pray for me.

MINGO."

CHAPTER VIII

SCARCELY had Mrs. Spadini, followed by her husband and Gino, appeared at the door, when a pale dishevelled woman, with fear in her eyes, threw herself at Mrs. Spadini's feet crying:

"Where is my boy? Where have you sent him? Don't you know anything about him? But who has found work for him? Where is he? Ah! Where is he, and where did he get the money he left? Dear lady, tell me, where has my Mingo gone, my dear boy, Mingo? Who advised him to go away? He is only a boy and he ought to be near his mamma. If you love God, tell me where he has gone and I shall go and bring him back. I also am a mother and I want my boy."

And she put her hands in her hair, calling his name and clinging to the skirt of Mrs. Spadini who tried to raise her.

When the maid announced the visit of Marianna, Mr. Spadini was sure that the author of the theft was Mingo, and he felt a sudden sentiment of aversion and of contempt for the fugitive who had betrayed his hospitality. Stiff as a rod, cold, and frowning, he looked at the woman without moving to help her. But as his son looked at him with tears in his eyes, he felt ashamed of himself.

"That woman is not to be blamed," he thought and going near her he tried to calm her.

"Don't go on like that," he said, "be reasonable. We shall know soon where he is. We know nothing now, I assure you. We did not advise him to go away. You are right, he is only a boy, he is however strong and healthy. Now don't cry. We shall look for him. We shall telegraph to my friends nearby. We'll receive notice immediately. Come, Marianna! have courage! Be reasonable or you will make yourself ill."

But the poor woman had fainted.



But the poor woman had fainted.

Mrs. Spadini gave a cry and bent over the unhappy woman. Gino, trembling, went to call the servants. Marianna was carried to the bedroom reserved for the guests while Mr. Spadini from the window called to the gardener, Uncle Mark:

“Quick! Go and call Doctor Bruni!”

* * *

While Marianna, weak and ill, was dressing herself to go to the Villa Spadini, Mingo, sitting on the edge of the path, sobbed with his face in his hands. He did not notice that the dawn had awakened the fields and the workers of the fields. He did not hear the moving of the steers who were at work ploughing the ground, nor the voice of the man who drove them, nor a song of a girl, who sang in happy strains in the lovely cool morning.

The noise of iron shoes on the stony path startled him.

“Who are coming to arrest me?” he asked himself.

But a donkey stopped with restless legs,

and an old country-woman who was seated on it cried:

“What are you doing here?”

Mingo lowered his head so as not to show his tears. He went to the donkey, took hold of the bridle, then with the free hand he stroked the beast’s neck. When he saw that the donkey was calm he left it and stood aside.

But the old woman noticed the kind act of the boy and said:

“Why have you been crying! What’s wrong with you?”

“What’s wrong with me?” asked the boy.
“I’m not a thief.”

“Who said you were a thief? I asked only why do you cry?”

Mingo wiped his eyes with the back of his hand. The eyes of the woman, although they were inquisitive, reassured him because he had never seen her before.

“Why I’m crying?—Because I don’t know the way to Rivochiaro.

“Rivochiaro?” she asked knitting her brows. “Rivochiaro! Where is that town?

“Ah!” she exclaimed, “it is not a town. I understand, I understand! Rivochiaro is near the sea—there is a bridge or something there. But what are you going to do at Rivochiaro—it’s so far away?”

“I’m going to work.”

“Work? You? Well, well! You can find work at Collefiore. But if you want to go to Rivochiaro go along the path until you come to a good road; take that. If you have good legs in a couple of hours you will arrive at a place called Arco. Cut through that little town and go always straight ahead until you arrive at Rivochiaro. It’s near the sea. There is a broken bridge there. You will arrive—tomorrow. Now don’t cry because you don’t know the way. You’ll meet many people and they will direct you. Where do you come from?”

“From—a farm—back there.”

“Near the mill of Mr. Spadini?”

“No—farther than that.”

“Near the creek, then?”

“No—still farther.”

The woman puckered her mouth and said to herself, "Who knows what he has done there?" She called to the donkey to go ahead; but being a mother she stopped it, and putting her hand into a basket at the side said, "Here, boy, take this slice of bread."

"No thank you, no thank you."

"Go along. It's good and fresh. Look at it."

"Thanks, dear lady, thanks."

"Goodbye, my son. Walk quickly—and be a man. May the good Madonna help you."

CHAPTER IX

FOR nearly twelve hours Mingo walked along the carriage road at first winding and narrow between high thickets of wild oak, then wide and running along a stream. His face was troubled and his eyes were squinting. He was unrecognizable. He seemed to hear a voice now dull now shrill but always mocking and menacing that gave him an indescribable feeling, a violent wish to scream. In his throat there was a parching thirst, a fire that no brook—and he saw many—could quench.

There was a buzzing in his head like a thousand bees that repeated the insult of that mysterious voice that seemed to well up from his heart—"Thief! thief!" Even the tender leaves whispered the same vile name and the sparrows, the gold-finches and the larks seemed to call, "Thief, thief!"

At first during the excitement of the first

few hours he had been able not to notice this condemnation. After that he was not able. Now he struggled against it like an adversary that tormented him continually. It was not enough for him to say to himself that he was not a robber and that he was running away, so as to work to pay back the hundred lire, and that as soon as he earned the money he would confess the sin. That was not enough. The voice confuted him:

“Who steals is a thief. There is no good reason to steal. The confession of the wrong and the paying back of the money do not cancel the crime.”

In the first hours he had met many country people dressed in their best clothes who were celebrating a holiday and who walked with quick steps and who laughed and sang. Sometimes carriages would pass and noisily going along would leave clouds of dust which covered him. He also met many barefooted children with dirty faces and unbrushed hair.

Afterwards the road became deserted. There was only he and that dazzling light,

he and his shadow which followed him and which clung to his heels like the mocking voice in his ears. He could have walked in the shadow sometimes but he was not tired and neither did he perspire. Only the voice persecuted him—“Thief! thief!” Only that he heard and he wanted to defend himself from that accusation.

But little by little also weariness commenced to torment him. And as this increased he defended himself more weakly. His fists were no longer closed, his head hung low, all his body relaxed. He did not defend himself now, he became penitent towards himself, he asked pardon of himself for what he had done. Then he felt a consolation and to satisfy the natural honesty of his heart he condemned himself:

“I must write a letter at once, I must confess at once my theft. Then I will have to sell my shoes, I must even go hungry so that I can pay back the stolen money.”

He was so tired after another mile that he staggered. His legs could scarcely move; his eyes, being nearly blinded by the sun.

he closed; his head swung from side to side as if it were on hinges; his tongue stuck to the roof of his mouth. Still he staggered along, with painful force. It was a cruel struggle against himself. But he went along, by suffering he could expiate.

Suddenly he heard the heavy tread of horses' feet. He looked up and saw two mounted guards of the highway. Mingo became pale. Were they looking for him? Were they going to arrest him? Had Mr. Spadini learned the truth about him? The thought of these things even if these guards came in an opposite direction from Collefiore did not calm his fear. He rushed from the road and hid himself in the bushes and only when they had passed did he start on again.

But his legs, even with that short rest, refused to move. He tried to force himself, he became rigid, he started again, but it was useless and he fell down upon the road.

A little after he saw coming towards him an old beggar carrying a long bag hung on a stick which rested on his shoulder. He

walked slowly, dragging his heavy shoes, and he was talking to himself. When he was near Mingo he leered at him, he saw that there was shade where the boy lay and he threw his bag down and took a place near him. Mingo moved away a little and looked at the old man who dried his face and hair with a large red handkerchief. His face was small and thin, his nose hooked, and his hands were the color of old wood and looked as if they had been carved. When he had put his handkerchief in his pocket he gave a sigh:

“How hot it is!”

With his bony hands he rummaged in the bag and drew out a slice of bread. He ate it slowly and wagging his head said:

“It doesn’t go down my throat. It’s too dry and my throat is dry too. Haven’t you something to give me?”

“I’m sorry, but I have nothing.”

The clear and good voice of the boy evidently surprised the beggar. He looked at him fixedly for a moment and then said in a voice studiously plaintive:

"I'm hungry. Really I'm nearly done for. Do a charitable act for me. Beyond that curve on the road there is a tree loaded with cherries. Go and get me some."

Mingo got up at once.

"Who do you think I am? Do you think I'm a thief?"

And before the beggar was able to reply, the boy had run away. The old man thinking that Mingo was going to tell the owner of the tree, got up cursing and slowly left the spot where he had hoped to eat and also take a nap.

Mingo soon stopped running. He rested a little and thinking that he could go better without shoes and stockings he took them off. After rubbing his feet he started again and he found that he suffered less pain.

The road was not straight and monotonous now. It approached a river in large easy curves, and on each side were low country houses from which came clucking of chickens, voices of children at play, the crackling of twigs burning on the fireplaces and often the sound of music. Mingo took



"Do you think I'm a thief?"



courage but he was very tired and hungry.

Suddenly in a turn of the road at the bottom of the flat country where the tender green of growing grain met the whitish green of the sea, the bridge of Rivochiaro stood out boldy with two of the arches broken. It was as if he unexpectedly saw his home. His heart beat quicker and he walked along with firmer step. A short time after he heard behind him the noise of a vehicle. He felt no fear. The sun inclined over the sea, the sky was brilliant, and the broken bridge bathed in the light seemed of gold. He felt the need of talking to someone.

Of whom should he have fear, now being so far away from Collefiore? He was very well able to say where he was going and he could give the reason.

The vehicle was a waggon drawn by two mules. Mingo stood in the middle of the road and raised his hand. The young man who was driving and singing stopped and pulled the reins.

“What do you want?” he asked.

“Is it far to Rivochiaro?”

"I should say it was."

"How far?"

"About three hours on foot."

"Great goodness!" Mingo exclaimed, and he looked towards the bridge.

The young driver watched him a moment.

"I can take you to the road that leads there if you give me two pennies. By doing that you will save an hour."

Mingo looked at him from head to foot.

"Give me one penny so that I can buy some tobacco."

"I haven't any money," replied Mingo.

"Goodbye then."

He cracked his whip and the mules started on a trot leaving a cloud of dust behind.

CHAPTER X

THAT beautiful and majestic bridge, one of the most beautiful in Italy, built for a railroad, had been abandoned, forgotten through a caprice of some kind. Twenty years had passed since the arches fell and very little was known about the disaster. Some said that a train had passed over it only once and that the three arches near the hill fell down just as the locomotive was entering the opposite tunnel. Others affirmed that a train had never gone across it because the disaster had made it impossible.

Be that as it may, it is certain that a wooden bridge was built nearer the sea in haste and the line of the railroad was modified to suit that change.

Now a project was on hand to rebuild those arches and use the bridge for electric train service, and the contract was given to a company of Naples.

Mingo reached the place where the construction was going on at night, and he could hardly stand on his feet. He had looked around so as to find a corner where he could sleep with some sort of covering over him. He had found a manger under a wooden roof inside of a fence and had curled himself up there.

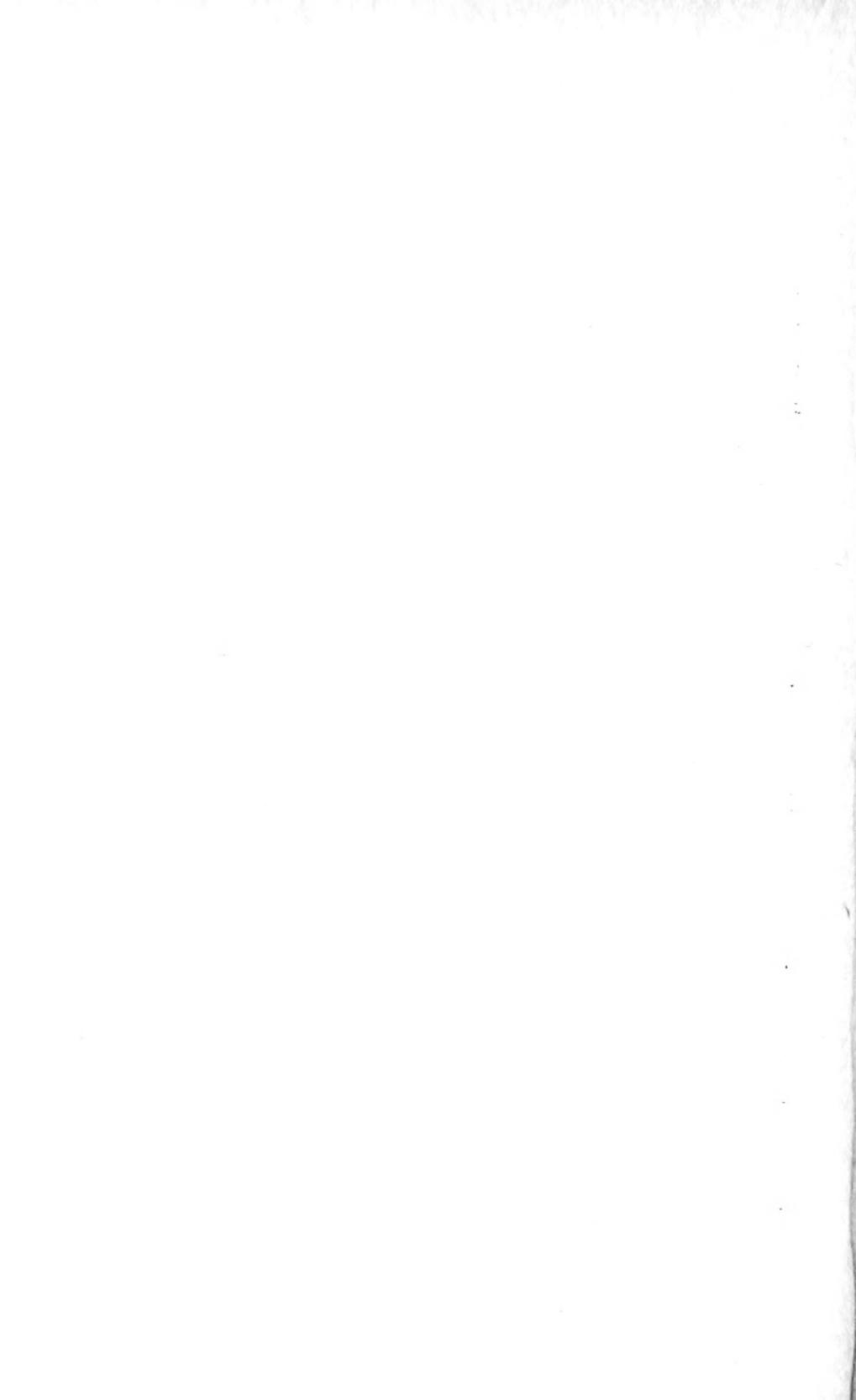
He was still sleeping even when the sun was high. From the bridge about six hundred feet away came noises of picks, hammers, steam-hoists, but this was not enough to waken the boy.

A neat little house of wood and corrugated iron had been built on the edge of the enclosure and it seemed uninhabited. But a chattering of children came from one of the opened windows.

From the door over which was a sign "Vitti, Cogliati and Co.," two children came out followed by a young lady who looked younger than she was. The children began to run behind their mother over the empty space, jumping up and down with little cries of joy like two puppies freed from the



The children began to run behind their mother.



leash. Then the mother sat down with her hair a little in disorder and her face red.

"Now play alone children," she said out of breath. "I can't run as I used to. To-night when Papa comes home, and when he asks me how you have been I shall say, 'Mamma's little darlings have been good' —and Papa will put his hand in his pocket and he will give you some chocolates. If instead you are not good I shall say to Papa, 'Mamma's little darlings have been bad—' and Papa will say, 'I give nothing to bad children and you must go to bed at once.' "

The two children did not take their mother's words seriously and with a jump they neared the fence in order to look at the sea through the openings.

"What shall we do, Nina?" asked the young brother.

"How many ships there are to-day!" the sister exclaimed. "One, two, three, five—why, there must be ten. Do you see them? Look, look, Alberto! When Papa comes home I'm going to ask him to buy me a gold-fish."

"I want a goldfish too. Where did Papa go?"

"Ten, eleven, twelve—"

"Where did Papa go, Nina?" the boy insisted. But Nina was too busy counting the ships. Then Alberto turned to his mother.

She had joined them and they were near the manger where Mingo was sleeping.

Mingo woke up with a start when he heard these voices, and he jumped to his feet. Hearing the noise the lady pushed open the gate in the fence and asked, forcing herself to appear angry:

"Ah! you scoundrel! Have you been sleeping here?"

"Yes," Mingo replied hanging his head.

"The idea! Just as if you owned the place."

"I was sleepy—I was very tired—I came from a long distance."

"From where? Why do you go alone?"

"Why do I go alone? Because I need work and I have come here to see if they will take me. Don Salvatore Santucci told me

there was plenty of it here. I left night before last and I came all the way on foot. I arrived last night late. I was so tired and I went to sleep here. I haven't done anything bad, have I?"

The lady smiled.

"What is the name of that man?"

"Don Salvatore Santucci."

"I'm sure I have heard that name before."

"Don Salvatore knows the two engineers, father and son, who are here."

"I am the wife of the engineer Cogliati."

"Are you really? And are these your children? You look so young."

Mrs. Cogliati laughed at that.

"My husband and another engineer direct the work here. The father is old and he comes rarely."

She looked attentively at the boy. She remembered that Mr. Cogliati had always spoken with reverent affection of Don Salvatore.

"But tell me, are you hungry?"

"I have only had three apples given to me by a driver since I started."

"Then come along with me."

She entered the house dragging her children who hung on to her skirt.

CHAPTER XI

MR. COGLIATI did not return that night. A telegram came saying that he would be absent a few days. He was a very busy man and his wife was accustomed to such telegrams, and as soon as she received this one she sent for the foreman.

He was not a very good man and it was strange that Cogliati and Co., so scrupulous in the choosing of their employees, did not know of the wanderings and the devices of this Lordevi who acted as foreman for the important work. At first he started out to be a priest, then he became a soldier, a policeman, a trader in chickens and finally emigrating to America had succeeded—who knows how because work did not please him—in scraping together a little money and a kind of gentility, so that he presented himself very well. To see him watching the work of the employees, with his felt cap with large brim and with his smoked glasses,

one would think that he was head of the firm, but his real position could be discovered by minute examination.

Called by Mrs. Cogliati, he put on a bland face and bowed and scraped before her. Knowing that Mr. Cogliati would be absent for a few days, he said:

"I am so sorry that your husband will be away so long. Really I am grieved. I am always glad when he is about not only to look at him but because he knows his business. Of course there is the other engineer but he knows nothing compared to—"

Mrs. Cogliati interrupted:

"A moment, please."

"As you wish, Madam."

"There is something that touches my heart."

"I am your servant, Madam."

"Thanks. This boy has been highly recommended and he would like to work with us."

"I understand," replied Lordevi without looking at Mingo, who was listening with the anxiety of one being judged for a ver-

dict. "I understand. You want, you would like—but—" here he stammered a little. "Oh—yes—I understand. But this boy is too small for our work."

"There are other boys working here."

"That's true Madam, that's very true. But, believe me, they are stronger—"

Mrs. Cogliati interrupted, laughing at that and said:

"Are you serious? Stronger than he? I would like to see them. They would be wonderful."

The foreman was confused. He tried another way.

"Well, what then?"

"Well really, what then?"

"To tell the truth, Madam, we have more men than we want."

"Oh! what are you saying? That won't go. Excuse me, you are wrong. You know very well that the Company must finish the bridge in a certain time. And there is a premium for every day before the allotted time. There are not too many working here. And the other day Mr. Cogliati

told me that he wanted more boys to help the older men."

The foreman had the impudence to reply:

"That may be, but I was not aware that we wanted anyone."

Mrs. Cogliati usually had her way, and she said dryly, emphasizing her words:

"With the Vitti, Cogliati Company it is enough when Mr. Cogliati states his wishes. As he is away and as I am taking care of his affairs—"

But the foreman tried once again:

"Excuse me, Madam. To take workmen with closed eyes, without knowing them, without knowing who presents them—"

"It is enough for you to know that I present this boy. Perhaps you are right in not wanting to assume the responsibility. I shall speak to my husband's partner, and not only that but I shall write my husband immediately."

Lordevi bowed his head but the defeat angered him, and Mingo, poor Mingo, there and then felt that the victory was in his favour.

CHAPTER XII

THE hour of joy, the first after many of suffering, came at last to Mingo, and his heart was full of it. A crowd of new sentiments, among them a kind of manly pride and faith in himself, pervaded him. He was able to work; his dream was a reality; notwithstanding many times he thought he could never reach attainment.

That which affected him more than anything else and electrified him was the thought that he would be able to pay back the money stolen and that he had been different from other robbers who hide behind walls and attack people.

“Ah! I’m not a thief, no!”

And he worked excitedly throwing into the car with big shovelfuls the pozzulana which made such good cement for the stones of the bridge. When the car was full he would push it with his arms to the dumping

place. On the return the car went more quickly, and jumping on top and then standing straight with forehead towards the wind and with laughing eyes, it seemed that he breathed in a new life.

Never, never was the sun more brilliant, the heavens more gay and the river more sparkling; and all around him, the immense sea—as he had never imagined it—the green fields, the sloping hills, the white road that climbed the mountain and over which he had walked, never, never did the world seem so beautiful to him. He was intoxicated, and thinking over the things that he had passed through he confessed to himself that he did not merit all these good things, and he resolved to make himself worthy with the enthusiasm of good and simple souls.

Mrs. Cogliati had given him a straw mattress, a blanket and a corner in the kitchen where he could sleep in exchange for small services that Mingo would do for her. Sometimes she would give him a plate of

soup which he joyfully welcomed because that allowed him to practice economy.

In the first evenings he would leave the house with Mrs. Cogliati, and two children and the humpbacked but lively servant, Anna, and under the starry heavens, lulled by the murmur of the distant sea and full of joy of the new life, he felt as if he were living in an enchanted abode, and everything appeared to him cheerful. He even felt that his mother was cheerful because she had money to pay the rent and buy medicine and food.

And while Mrs. Cogliati would laugh heartily at the funny stories of Anna, and the two children would count the stars quarrelling with each other, he, apart, would think of his work and he would count over the days when he would be able to pay back the money to Mr. Spadini.

Sometimes Anna approached him and shaking him by the shoulders would ask, "For pity's sake! what are you thinking about?"

The first time Mrs. Cogliati had replied:
“Leave him alone, Anna, he is thinking
about his mother.”

But she began also to chide him for his
surliness.

“You are as silent as a clay pigeon!” she
would say.

Then Mingo would take the children one
under each arm and would run with them
until he was out of breath. He would drop
them softly on the ground and they would
laugh and cry, “Mingo, do it again, only
once more!”

But he, with excuses, would go away and
begin to think again. Somehow he could
not get away from his thoughts.

Also while working he liked to be alone.
The other boys tried to draw him out but
they did not succeed.

“What’s your name?”

“Mingo.”

“Bingo or Mingo I know not what—
The meat’s in the pot and the water’s not hot.
The knife won’t cut, that makes me sad,
Mingo, Bingo is growing mad.”

“Where do you come from?”

“Over the mountain.”

As they could get nothing more out of him they tried to irritate him by squinting at him their eyes, and they would call to him:

“Potatoes are good, hey what?”

“Houses are made of potatoes, hey?”

“Houses! Why he has a potato head!”

They would bark like a dog and whine like a cat at him.

But Mingo payed little attention and he filled his car with pozzulana and pushed it to the dumping place. Who were they, anyway? One day one of them, wiping the perspiration which was not on his forehead, said to him:

“This is dog’s work, isn’t it?”

Mingo replied without stopping his work:

“However, we are paid for it.”

“Bravo! You talk like a book.” Then turning to his companions he said, “Do you hear how this potato-eater preaches? Look how he works!”

"Let him alone," said one of them. "A new broom sweeps well."

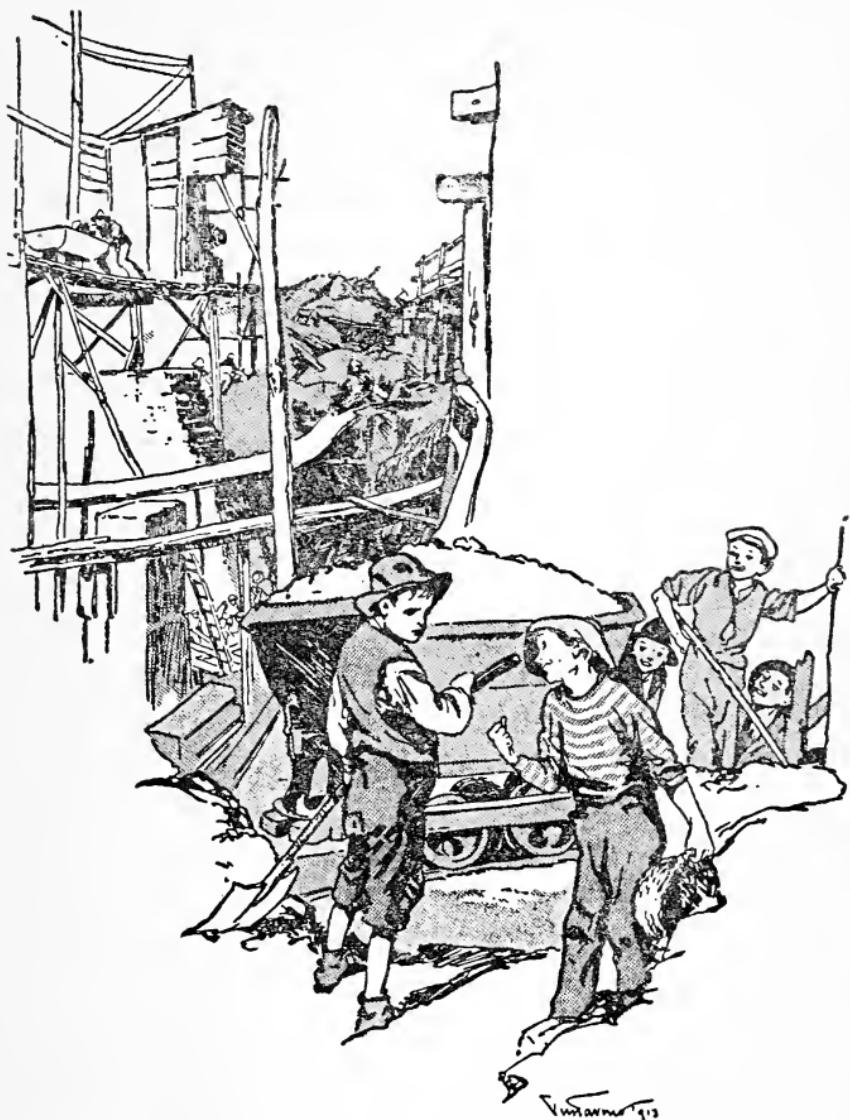
"Still, he could save some of his strength."

"How?" asked Mingo.

"You ninny! The foreman's not here. We only work when he is about."

Mingo looked at him with eyes wide open and the others snickered in his face.

If these insults had come to him at Collefiore they would have swollen the veins in his neck. Now, no. He felt himself changed. He had another view of life. The certainty that in a few days he would have thirty-five lire made him ignore these tricks. Thirty-five lire! What had become of that Mingo who used to make ten cents a day gathering dried twigs? He had sung while working in the forest, but what was that small voice compared to the hundred that came from the bridge? It was like a chorus, a grand chorus that enraptured him but made him also fearful. And while his companions accompanied that chorus with silly sounds and words, with cries and with mockery, he listened to it with a de-



V. M. Tamm 1912

"The foreman's not here. We only work when he is about."

votion as when seated at the feet of his mother he followed the hymns in church.

One day imitating the songs of his town, he composed one that seemed to him like a lovely poem!

“Flowers, dear little living stars,
“Hurrah for the shovel, hurrah for the cars!”

If he had been alone in the forest as he had been many times he would have sung aloud those words, but there among the others so ready to make fun of him, he was ashamed. He satisfied himself by singing them to himself. Another day he saw a train carrying bricks for the bridge.

“How many hands,” he thought, “have touched those bricks? Now some of them I touch. I also am helping to build those three arches. If someone would only write the names of the workmen! So he took a piece of chalk and wrote on one of the piers “M. G. 19th May—” The initials seemed not enough so he wrote “Mingo Grandi of Collefiore.”

* * *

The foreman Lordevi often showed himself among the boys who worked with Mingo, because he had little faith in them and every time they spoke badly about Mingo.

"Your car," he said one day to the boy, "is always half full."

Mingo looked at him amazed and turned to his companions as if asking them to contradict that statement.

"You must do better—or I—" The foreman continued: "Don't imagine that you have protectors, do you understand? I am responsible here and no one can loaf."

Mingo wanted to justify himself but he only nodded his head. What would he have gained if he had spoken? Surely he understood that the foreman did not like him, and though his unjust criticism did not please Mingo he did not take it seriously.

But another reprimand hurt him very much.

One evening, before twilight, he went as he usually did to fill a bucket of fresh water a half a mile away for Mrs. Cogliati. He

found the entrance closed and he had to search for the person who had the key. That took time and he returned a little later and he found Mrs. Cogliati a bit vexed. She scolded him. She did not become angry and the next morning she smiled as usual, and Mingo being grateful for that felt sorry. "It was not my fault," he wanted to say but he could not say it. That night while trying to sleep he thought of his mother and he thought he saw her weeping.

Ah! one thing was sure! No one had ever loved him like his mother. And who knows, perhaps she was no better and perhaps she suffered because he ran away!

CHAPTER XIII

IN fact, the condition of poor Marianna gave to those near great concern. In her calm moments she listened to words of comfort and sometimes she smiled when they told her that Mingo would soon return. But periods of fever came. Then, sitting up in bed, with much difficulty supported by Mrs. Spadini and the servants she would call for her Mingo, for her angel.

“Mingo, Mingo, where are you? Come to Mamma. Mingo! Here he is! Here he is! Come here, Mingo, let me fold you in my arms. No, I won’t scold you. You are a good boy and you love your Mamma. You’ve done this for her. I know. Don’t go away. It’s night, Mingo. It’s dark. You will lose your way. You will hurt yourself. Are you being treated badly? Are you being beaten? No! No! No one can beat my Mingo!”



"I feel sure he presented himself in my name."

Mr. Spadini did not know what to do. At first he was a little annoyed at having Mingo's mother in his house, but then he began to look for the boy. His attempts around the country resulted in failures. He wanted to send for the police but he knew that Marianna would not like that.

One morning he had an idea!

"Don Salvatore perhaps could help him." So he sent for the priest.

The good man came immediately and after he learned what had happened, he exclaimed:

"But listen. But listen! Mingo is a boy full of courage. But to go away alone without saying where—it is strange. But where could he have gone? Who could give him work near Collefiore?"

"Oh!" he cried, adjusting the glasses to the end of his nose, "I think I have found him."

He spoke of Mingo's visit and of his desire for work, and he said also that perhaps work could be found at the bridge at Rivochiaro.

"Yes, he has gone there and I feel sure he presented himself in my name because I told him I knew the Cogliatis very well."

"We shall write at once to Cogliati," proposed Mr. Spadini.

But Gino was in the room and he said:

"Why not telegraph?"

"You are right, Gino," the father replied, "a telegram with reply paid to the engineer Cogliati to know if among the employees there is a boy with the name of Mingo Grandi, arrived there only a few days ago."

Don Salvatore standing up in the study did not reply. His face was lowered and his right hand pressed his forehead. With his long hair curled at the neck, his large forehead wrinkled and with his glasses on the end of his nose, he looked like one of those priests that one sees in pictures.

Mr. Spadini hated silence when he proposed an idea. But that old, poor and simple priest, pious as a good mother and austere as a hermit, seemed to him like virtue personified.

"Listen, Mr. Spadini," he said, "a tele-

gram would be useless. Where you would send it is far from the bridge and it would take a few days—”

“But we could send it to the station.”

“Perhaps. But I am not thinking of that. If the boy is really working there, what would Mr. Cogliati think? In a letter we could explain better. We could say that Mingo is really a model of a boy—”

“A model of a boy!” cried Mr. Spadini, growing angry. “What are you thinking about?”

The priest raised his head and looked at him fixedly. Gino fearing that his father would reveal the theft of Mingo became pale, and he said:

“But father, Mingo *is* a good boy.”

Mr. Spadini turned to him.

“Why do you open your mouth? Who taught you to be insolent? Get out—get out!”

Don Salvatore looked at the boy who went away sobbing:

“Mr. Spadini, I do not understand—”

Mr. Spadini invited him by a movement

of his hand to sit down. Then he took the armchair near him.

"Excuse me, Don Salvatore," he said, "because I gave way to anger. You of course know my esteem for you is very great."

"But that poor boy Mingo?"

"He is a bad boy," replied Mr. Spadini. "He is not worthy of good words from you. He is stained, I don't know how many times before, with a grave sin, especially for his age. An honest man would condemn him. He is a thief."

"A thief?" asked the priest drawing back and frowning. "A thief? Are you sure of what you say, Mr. Spadini?"

"Yes. He is a thief. Listen."

Then he told him in a low voice about the last time Mingo was at his house, how Mingo was surprised to see the bills and finally how Marianna had said she had found two of them—one hundred lire—in the letter Mingo had left before he ran away.

"Am I right now in saying that he is a thief?" asked Mr. Spadini.

Don Salvatore followed every word with brows knit, but now his face was calm and sweet.

“Mr. Spadini,” he said, “I say now more than ever that I love that boy—more than ever, he is my brother—yes, I can say my son.”

Mr. Spadini was surprised. He could not understand what the priest meant and he said sarcastically:

“Even you, like my wife, like Gino, justify that boy. Then the wicked will go to heaven!”

The priest wanted to ask if there were wicked people in this world; but he said:

“The wicked, no: but the unfortunate—we do not punish them, instead, we pity them.”

“Pity them! Pity them! But Don Salvatore, must we not belong to a higher society? How can we perfect humanity if we do not punish the wrongdoers?”

The priest nodded yes with his head, smiling, and then Mr. Spadini raising his voice asked:

“What do you think?”

“It is this, Mr. Spadini. Let us understand each other well. Who are those we call wicked and unfortunate?”

“Those who profit of the hospitality of others and those who steal are wicked.”

“Yes,” said the priest shaking his head, “and if unfortunate circumstances arise? I ask you this, Mr. Spadini. He who breaks an arm of one who is like him with a stick, is he wicked or unfortunate?”

“He is wicked.”

“But if he does that to defend himself?”

“Then that is legitimate, Don Salvatore.”

“You would excuse that?”

“Of course, also the law excuses that.”

“That’s lovely, Mr. Spadini,” said the priest with his good eyes smiling. “Also a thief very often works to defend himself. Yes, yes, also a thief defends himself. A poor woman who cannot support her children and steals bread for them, she defends herself. A boy hungry and starving who steals a piece of bread defends himself, because we allow dogs to eat bread thrown

away and also we allow birds to eat fruit in our orchards. I am sure God does not condemn the dags or the birds. Why should we condemn men under such circumstances?"

"Fine words, Don Salvatore. You then want to allow stealing?"

"No! Mr. Spadini, no, we must not allow stealing. I excuse him, who finding himself really in a state when he cannot live, *understand when he cannot live*, after trying to find work which is denied him—I excuse him when he takes bread that others would give to the dogs. I will never say to a starving man, 'Go, and steal.' But I will say if he has stolen, 'You are unfortunate.'"

"And that boy of Marianna's is unfortunate? Did he steal to defend himself? No, no, no! You, like all other saints, excuse the sins of others."

"I am sorry you say that about Mingo. Believe me, Mr. Spadini, I know something of the world. That boy had a mother very ill, there was no food in the house, the father stopped sending money. Why? No one knows. The doctor ordered medicine.

They did not have even bread and the owner of the house threatened to turn them out. Mingo looked for work here and there; he offered all that he could offer. He was contented to have only enough for his mother and his little brother. He spoke to me and I said that you and Mrs. Spadini would help him, and he replied that he was ashamed to beg. Do you understand, Mr. Spadini? *He was ashamed to beg.* He told me so and he said that from his heart. He is a good boy. Meanwhile he came to your house; he saw luxury everywhere. He saw only one chair, only one ornament that would keep his mother alive if he had money of its value. Now I ask you, is he a villain who asks justice for a boy under such circumstances?"

"No, no," replied Mr. Spadini, "I do not blame you."

"At least," the priest said, "an unfortunate must, like Mingo, find a heart that responds to the heart of Christ—for he pardoned—"

"I'm afraid," interrupted Mr. Spadini,

"that all this forgiveness will spoil the people instead of raising them."

"And why?" asked the priest. "A good act, love for your brother-men, can that result in disaster?"

At that moment the church bells began to ring.

"My little church calls me," he said taking up his hat quickly. "I must go."

"But we have not spoken of what we must do."

"If it will not disturb you after prayers, I shall return."

"Yes, do that, and as it will take some time, you must sup with us."

"If you really wish me, I shall gladly come," accepted the priest.

At supper they decided to tell Marianna that they thought Mingo was at Rivochiaro as all probabilities pointed to that supposition and that they would begin inquiring immediately. The mother was comforted by this news, and Don Salvatore with fatherly earnestness wrote to his old friend Cogliati and sent the letter to Rivochiaro.

Mrs. Cogliati received the letter and forwarded it to her father-in-law, but he at that time of the year travelled in all parts of Italy and the letter followed him from place to place. Don Salvatore waited three days, five, a week, two weeks without a reply, and he began to doubt that Mingo was at Rivochiaro.

But one evening while Mr. Spadini was criticising Mr. Cogliati because he had not sent a reply, and while Don Salvatore tried to excuse him by saying, "Who knows if he received my letter—and then he is a very busy man," a letter came from Mingo directed to Gino.

The envelope did not bear a post-mark for it had been mailed on the Ambulance train from Bolórgna to Foggia. Mingo wrote confessing his fault, recounting with touching simplicity how and when he had taken the money, asking pardon of his friend and promising to pay back the hundred lire. He said that he was working and that he was happy. But he gave no indication of the place.

Gino with moist eyes, said, "I'm so glad he is happy. We must tell Marianna."

"That letter makes me feel sure," said Don Salvatore, "that Mingo is at Rivochiaro because there is a station on that line about half an hour's walk from the bridge."

But to be absolutely sure, the priest when he returned home wrote a letter to a mason of a village near Rivochiaro whom he had known for many years, asking him to inquire about Mingo Grandi. However, after fifteen days the mason replied saying that he had moved from the village and that he was now living in Genoa.

He tried other ways but without success. This worried him. Not only that, but the sick woman, without other news from Mingo, was threatened with a relapse.

The best thing for him to do would be to go to Rivochiaro in Mr. Spadini's buggy. One day of discomfort, it is true, would be trying for his weak back but he wanted to satisfy himself and the suffering mother.

On that very day Mr. Spadini had to go to see the electric mill that he was building,

and the day after the pain in the back of the priest increased.

"That is not dangerous," Doctor Bruni assured him.

"It is dangerous for an old man," replied the good priest smiling. "The tree begins to lean towards the earth—one day it will fall."

CHAPTER XIV

AFTER two weeks of work Mingo had earned thirty-five lire, and all smiling he gave to Mrs. Cogliati ten lire, which she had loaned him to pay for his lunch and dinner to the owner of the restaurant called "The New Bridge." Also he gave her the rest to keep for him. He did this for two reasons. One was that he feared someone would steal it, the other, to show Mrs. Cogliati that he was not working for himself alone.

The next two weeks began; but—the enthusiasm of the first days was lacking. Mrs. Cogliati said to him:

"Be cheerful—be gay! God helps those who are cheerful."

He felt in his heart a kind of discontent.

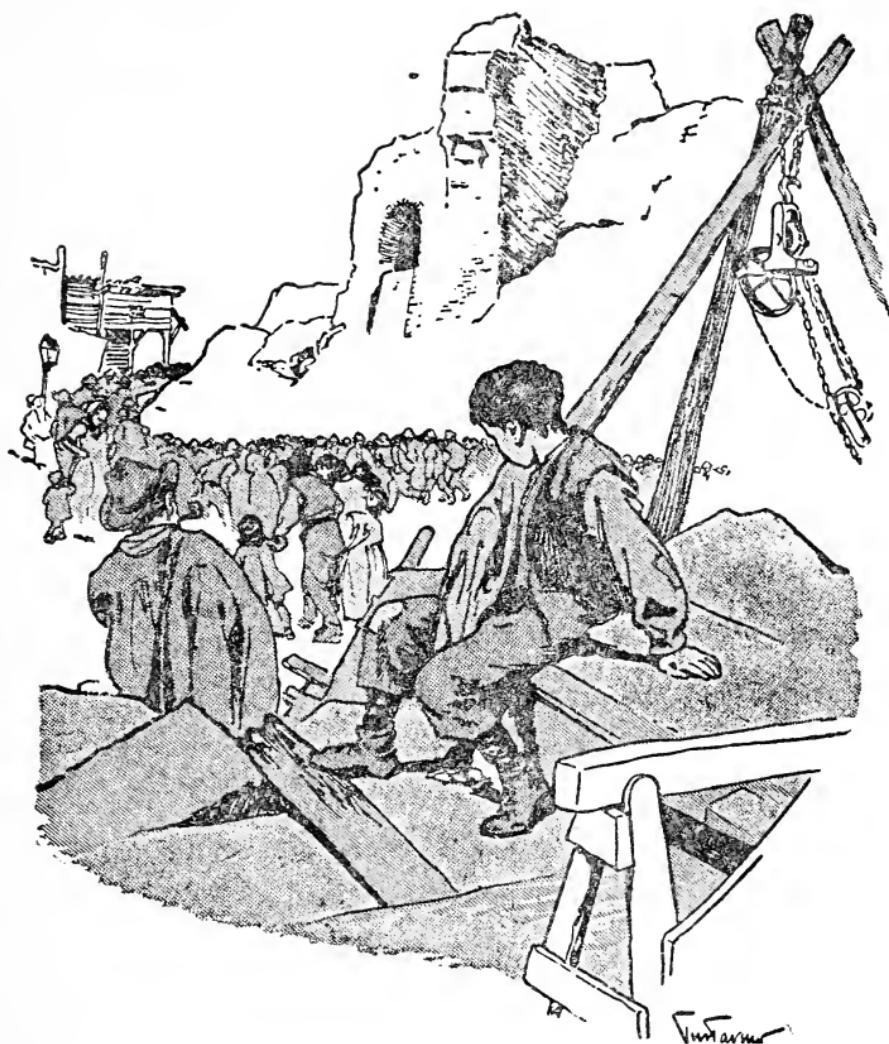
He was not tired but he lacked something.

When at sunset the heavens became pale

and the workmen went to their houses to their wives or mothers or sisters or brothers, Mingo felt very much alone—his mother and brother were far away. He did not feel that, the first few days.

In vain he recalled to his memory his wrong and the promises made to remedy it. In vain did he find fault with himself for being only a boy and his trying to be a man. His sadness got the better of him. He wanted a good honest friend of his own age. But he did not find one in those who worked with him.

He had isolated himself from the first days he began work. And it was his fault that he lost the sympathy of Mrs. Cogliati. She could not stand boys with long thoughtful faces—boys like clay pigeons, as she said, and she said it every evening. Also she asked, "Why don't you play with all your heart with the children? Why, instead of laughing at Anna's stories, are you sullen?" It was strange. The solitude to which he had condemned himself degraded him, ex-



When at sunset the heavens became pale and the workmen went to their houses. . . .

asperated him, but he could not get away from it.

Those with whom he worked, seeing him always thoughtful and silent had come to dislike him, and they showed their antipathy in vile words, in injurious nicknames, in jokes bad and cruel upon him. The worst of them were the boys who had already learned to smoke and to swear.

One day they hid his jacket. He looked everywhere for it and they told him that an older boy had taken it. Mingo asked him kindly where it was but the older boy gave him a violent push that sent him rolling upon a heap of stones.

"Do you think I want to steal your old rags?" he asked.

Another day he could not find his shoes and stockings, which he had taken off so as not to wear them out too much and which he had placed behind a basket. Thinking that they were playing a joke upon him he asked no one where they were, but after searching for some time he found

them loaded with stones in a puddle of water.

But would he allow these boys to tease and torment him like this?

One morning at lunch hour, which was the most noisy of the day, one of his companions, thin and pale, who once was caught searching the jacket pockets of a workman, began to deride him. One of the things he said was that Mingo worked hard so as to win favor from the foreman and so as to make the other boys work harder. Mingo made no reply.

"Why don't you open your mouth?" the others asked so as to enrage him. "Hit him with your fist."

"Yes, hit me if you dare!" challenged the bad, thin and pale boy.

Mingo became angry and with fists clenched said: "I'm not afraid of you or any of the rest in a fair fight. No one can touch me even with a finger."

The others laughed and the older workmen gathered round.



With powerful force he succeeded in throwing the boy to the ground.

"Look at the kid from over the mountains."

"He looks like a wild goat!"

"Hit him!"

"Uh! Uh!"

The thin pale boy went to him and blew a mouthful of smoke in his face.

Mingo rushed at him growling like a beast. The inciter tried to liberate himself from those two arms that seemed like iron. He twisted and turned, he kicked, he yelled, he cursed. But Mingo held him as if the other was nailed to the spot.

At that moment Mingo was handsome. His feet were firmly planted, his back arched, his head buried in the bosom of his adversary, and though he was so young he appeared like a little gladiator. With powerful force he succeeded in throwing the boy to the ground. But just at that time two cries were heard.

"Have you had enough?" cried Mingo.

"Ha, ha!" cried the foreman.

Yes, he had appeared at that moment, and while the other boys sided with the one who

was conquered the foreman rushed at Mingo and beat him with his fists. He seemed like one possessed with the devil.

“Tomorrow you quit work!” he yelled. “No—today. You’ve got to go away. I say that and you will see. I don’t want you any more here!”

Mingo felt a shiver between his shoulders.

“I was not the first! I was insulted and I became angry.”

But the other boys cried out: “Don’t believe him. He’s a vile bad boy. Send him away.”

The foreman feeling himself upheld in his judgment scowled at Mingo, who was shaking, pale and sick at the thought of being obliged to go away. But two older workmen took his part.

“It isn’t true! It isn’t true. Mingo is a good boy. That other rascal who is crying now insulted him. We saw it all. The other boys egged him on.”

Then turning to the foremen, one said:

“You must understand before judging

how things are. Mingo is a boy who never harms anyone, he works harder than the rest. Before you discharge him you've got to consider us."

The foreman felt himself stung to the quick. But he gave himself the expression of authority and with his strong voice said:

"There are no lawyers here. I alone will judge what is right."

"But how about us?" said the other squaring himself. "You can't order us about like cattle."

Lordevi became pale, and knave as he was he knew that it was useless to quarrel with those two men. They were tried workmen and esteemed by Mr. Cogliati. Besides, he had no right to beat Mingo as he did. He became more lenient but he did not lose his air of authority.

"Mr. Cogliati when he learns of this will take my advice. As for me, I'll have nothing more to do with this ninny, this good-for-nothing, this spy."

CHAPTER XV

MINGO however was not discharged. His place was changed. He was taken from the car and he was obliged to carry mortar to the masons who worked on the arches. The new work required more of his strength but he did not complain. It was not really work for a boy. The others were men of twenty-five and he was the only one who was twelve. He did not lose courage and he tried to be happy in the new position.

"I'm glad of the change," he said to himself. "I'll show these older men that I am not a good-for-nothing."

But though courageous and robust, as he was, he could not stand that kind of work. When he mounted the ladder with the weight on his shoulder he trembled and he would grab the rungs so as not to fall. The river running under the bridge made him

dizzy but he closed his eyes and struggled on.

It was not this that pained his heart. Ah, if only some one would be kind to him, if some one would love him, and he always remembered the cruel word of the foreman — “Spy.”

He a spy? He had never said a word to Mr. Cogliati?

And he became more quiet and sad and, yes, sometimes he would cry himself to sleep. Oh! if he could only find a friend!

Strange to say he wanted now to confess his error, to hear himself condemned by others. He thought if he would confess he would find comfort and that he would be the same Mingo that was loved by nearly everybody.

But to whom could he confess? To the hump-backed Anna who always made fun of him? To Mrs. Cogliati who always reproved him between her smiles? Why not? She, even if she joked with him about his silent attitude, took an interest in him. She had made him talk about his sick

mother, about his father who did not write from America, and of the misery of his family. But she was not satisfied with that. There was something else and she was eager to find out Mingo's secret.

One evening, with motherly love, she bandaged Mingo's shoulder which was sore from carrying the mortar and Mingo with heart swollen wanted to kiss her hands. She said to him:

"You do not even say thanks to me for bathing your shoulder. Really, Mingo, there is little satisfaction in doing favors for you."

Mingo raised his head and looked at her like one absentminded. She read in his eyes and in his agitation more than he would have been able to say in words. But she insisted. She wanted him to justify himself.

"I have given you work in spite of that foreman. I do good to you in a hundred ways. But you do not show any gratitude. You don't love my children. You sometimes won't reply to my questions."



Mingo could hold back no longer.

"No, no, Mrs. Cogliati," cried Mingo,
"That's not true—no—no!"

"Oh! I understand very well. You are a boy without a heart. And sometimes I think you have been bad to your mother. Perhaps it is because of you, your father does not write. Sometimes I think you have committed a sin. He who has a clear conscience behaves differently from you."

Mingo could hold back no longer and between sobs that choked his throat he cried convulsively:

"Yes, yes. I have committed a sin and remorse has made me a bad boy. Yes, yes, send me away! I'm not worthy of all you have done for me. Yes, yes, I have robbed. I have stolen—I'm a thief—a thief—a thief!"

"You have robbed? But when and where?"

"Here—no, in the town where I lived in a house of a man whose son was my closest friend. At home there was hunger, my mother was dying, they were going to throw us out of the house because rent was not

paid. At that time I did not understand anything. I didn't know what I was doing."

"And you ran away?"

"Yes, I ran away so as to work and to pay back the money I stole. But—oh! Mrs. Cogliati, I'm not worthy of sleeping in your kitchen. Send me away, drive me out of the house, but don't treat me badly like the others, like everyone here."

Mrs. Cogliati, confused and ashamed, was about to take the boy in her arms when the door opened and in rushed Anna and the children.

"Why is Mingo crying?" Anna asked.

Mingo ran from Mrs. Cogliati, fearing that she would reveal that which even his mother did not know.

But Mrs. Cogliati was trying to smile:

"Why—why? He is a dear little stupid boy. Naturally he thinks of his mother and father and of his little brother, but I think everything will turn out well. Anna, go and warm up a plate of soup for him. He is tired tonight and the meals at the

restaurant are not very good. Oh! yes, he is crying—and I don't know why it is, I feel like crying too. But never mind. Why, Anna! You are crying!"

She forced a laugh and clasped her children to her breast.

In fact Anna was crying.

CHAPTER XVI

THE next day Mingo worked with tormenting anxiety. Would Mrs. Cogliati tell anyone of his confession?

A little before mid-day Anna came and called him.

He felt cold. He became pale, then he blushed. As he went with her to the house he walked as if dazed. He presented himself with head lowered. Mrs. Cogliati sent Anna to the kitchen and took him into her room. There could be no doubt about it. They were going to send him away. He leaned against a table for he felt weak in his legs.

"I have sent for you because I have need of you," she said.

To Mingo it seemed he did not hear aright.

"Yes, I have need of you. The money has arrived to pay the wages for the next

two weeks. I would like to go myself and deposit it in the bank as I have often done, and Mr. Cogliati could also go—but he is so busy that I don't want to disturb him. I think you are capable of doing this for me. I shall write a short note and you shall take it to the bank with the money—ten thousand lire."

Mingo could not speak, he wanted to smile but he did not succeed. He felt bewildered but it was the bewilderment of joy.

That evening he wrote to his mother.

* * *

He had promised Mrs. Cogliati that he would change his life, and he said to himself, "If they make fun of me I shall be the first to laugh. If they say one word to me I shall reply with two. I want to laugh, to play, to sing, to show myself happy."

In order to encourage himself he remembered that not all of the employees treated him badly; that some of them among the older men had not only scolded his torment-

ors but had spoken kindly to him and had encouraged him. Thinking of this was like a ray of light in a dark prison. How about those two men who defended him against the foreman?

One day as an old workman was passing over the scaffolding a plank gave way, and he would have fallen if Mingo had not caught him. He said:

“You blessed boy, you have saved my life. How can I repay you?”

Mingo smiled.

Another day a young man saw him pass his hand over his brow with a tired gesture and he asked him:

“What’s the matter? To-day I also feel tired and my head is in a whirl.”

Yes, yes, it was necessary to use a little force and to be courageous.

One morning he heard this conversation between two young workmen:

“How long has it been?”

“Two weeks.”

“No news, good news.”

“It’s impossible. They always write

once a week and sometimes twice. Really I am worried."

"Is your father very old?"

"Yes, but until last year he was always well and strong. In December he caught pneumonia which left him a little weak. Fifteen days ago he caught it again but they said it was only a light attack. Since then I have had no news."

"Send a telegram."

"I have thought of that, but after work in the evening the telegraph office is closed."

"That's so. What next?"

Mingo stepped forward.

"If you wish to send a telegram now I'll go to the telegraph office."

"You?" asked the young man looking at him.

"Yes, I. You write it and as soon as the whistle blows at twelve o'clock I shall run to the station."

"But you can't go and come in an hour."

"It will take you two," said the other.

"And the foreman?"

"It's all the same," said Mingo, raising

his shoulders. "I can lose an hour's work. The foreman will be surly again. But I'm accustomed to that now."

The young men smiled.

One said: "In the hour lost we shall take up a collection for you."

"No, no," protested the other who now looked at Mingo with eyes full of gratitude. "No, I shall reimburse him myself and I shall add something besides."

"What are you saying?" asked Mingo. "I don't want to be paid for such a little favor. I know what it means to have a sick parent and not to receive news."

The next morning while he was carrying mortar he saw coming towards him, waving a sheet of paper, the young man who had been anxious the day before? It was a reply to his telegram.

"Good news!" he said. "They wrote me last week but the letter has gone astray. Father is better."

"Now you won't have any more sad thoughts," said Mingo.

"No, not now," replied the young man.

He went away without saying thanks. But it was enough for Mingo to make a friend and to do a good action.

CHAPTER XVII

AFTER several days of suffocating sultriness, the fresh wind that came from the mountains where it had rained was really a blessing. Don Salvatore was at the window of his home feeling it blow on his face and feeling it playing at the roots of his white hair. He looked with loving eyes at his canary-birds in the cage by the window and at three chickens in the orchard, who elongated their necks and stretched their wings so that the fresh breeze would penetrate the pores of their bodies.

His attentive manner was broken by an idea.

“Doctor Bruni,” he said to himself, “advises me to stay at home for another day. What if I go out to-day? One day before or after won’t make much difference. The pains are less to-day and Marianna is worse



He walked slowly toward the Villa Spadini.

than I am. The wind is fresh, I shall walk slowly without tiring myself. It's ten days since I have seen my little church and that unfortunate woman."

He took up his hat and cane and told his servant that he was going out for a stroll.

He went to his small church—perfumed on that day with lavender flowers—with the smiling face of a boy who was going to see a dear friend again.

An hour later he walked slowly down the hill to the Villa Spadini thinking over what he could say to Marianna so as to keep hope awake in her heart. But he had little faith in his words this time. He found them weak and strained.

When he reached the garden of the Villa he saw Gino running to him as gay as a lark.

"How are you, Don Salvatore?" the boy asked. "Only a minute ago the postman left a letter from Mingo to his mother."

"Really? Thank heaven, thank heaven!"

"Mamma says that you ought to hand the letter to her."

"Thanks, thanks. Mamma is very good. Let's hurry."

Mrs. Spadini was waiting for them at the door.

"Not so fast, Don Salvatore," she said. "Don't forget you have a weak back."

It was marvellous how the priest mounted the steps. But reaching the landing he had to stop. Oh! those pains! He shook hands with Mr. Spadini and then went to the sick room followed by Mrs. Spadini and Gino.

Hearing the footsteps, Marianna who was taking a nap woke up and looked around with eyes full of fear. But seeing those smiling faces she began to think that they brought good news.

"Mingo?" she asked.

"Mingo is well, dear Marianna," said the priest. "He has written you a letter. Look! Here it is!"

The woman gave a cry of joy. She sat up in bed and extended her hands for the letter.

"Mingo, Mingo, Mingo," she said with love in her voice.

She could say nothing else. She grasped the letter, caressed it, kissed it with her eyes swimming in tears.

Mrs. Spadini was scared but Don Salvatore reassured her with a glance. Then she called Gino and made him sit near her on the bed.

"You must read it," said Mrs. Spadini, "because you love Mingo as a brother."

"Yes, yes," Marianna approved, "here, beside me." She drew him near her and rested her cheek lovingly on the boy's head; so tenderly did she do this that the others were moved.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE work on the bridge was nearly at an end. But there was still a connecting road from the trolley line to be built. Mingo had been chosen to take part in that construction and he was glad to find himself under the orders of another foreman called Giacomo, one of those two who had defended him on the day he had the fight. Think of it! he was chosen out of all the other boys! Giacomo had not been very gentle when he called Mingo, but the boy did not care. That man had defended him once and had replied with a friendly voice when Mingo saluted him.

“Ah! potato-eater,” he had said, “come here! I want to try and raise that head of yours which you always keep lowered to your chest like a monk. Come here, and be always ready to do what I order you to do, do you understand?”

Mingo did not reply, but became red with joy.

"Pay strict attention, if not—there will be blows that will raise the skin on that cocoanut of yours."

"I'm not afraid of that," said Mingo smiling.

In fact Giacomo made the men under him walk a chalk line. A proved workman and esteemed by all, he often spoke of the years in which he had been a simple labourer and of the attention he had given to every little duty. Therefore he would not pardon negligence.

"A good workman," he said, "is formed in the first years."

Sometimes he exaggerated, it is true. His subordinates were covered with an avalanche of apostrophes, polite, for a simple error. But no one took this amiss because they knew him to be gruff but with good intentions.

To be near him was really an unexpired premium for Mingo, who a month before never dreamed of such a position. Now he

would be able to be near him all the time, to speak to him and to do so many little services.

One day Giacomo said:

"It seems impossible, Mingo, but you are really not a bad boy at all."

In a little more than a month, what a change! It was as if the heavens had become clear and shining after a storm. Mingo had no more enemies; but the principal thing was that he was not teased any more and some treated him benevolently. Even the boy whom he had beaten tried to become his friend. And Mingo repaid them all with interest. Was there an errand to be done? He ran to do it. Was there need of help? Mingo was there to help. He liked them all now and above all he liked his new master Giacomo.

But if Mingo had known how much Giacomo was doing for him he would have kissed his hands and he would have loved him like a father. When this faithful workman had seen him, quiet, always alone, almost afraid to make friends with others,

he understood that that boy was different from the other boys and that Mingo had suffered misfortune. When now he knew the boy better, he saw that he was always prompt, intelligent, earnest and careful, and not only that but that he was eager to serve and sought all kinds of ways to be useful. Giacomo learned by prudent questions that Mingo's mother was sick, that his father was in America and that the boy was trying to aid the family; then the rough under-foreman liked him as every father likes unfortunate boys. He began to speak well of Mingo to those about him, then with others, and finally the workmen thought kindly of the boy who was always eager to work.

One day Giacomo was very happy. A man who drove a wagon filled with bags of wheat, and who came from his home town, brought with him his youngest son. The under-foreman had not seen the boy for months and now he was to be with them three hours, only three hours.

When the driver came back Giacomo

kissed the boy goodbye and watched him until the wagon disappeared. Then he turned to Mingo and said:

"If I could only see that dear son of mine every day!"

But he began work again and he whistled as he had never done before. At mid-day he made Mingo sit near him. But Mingo was thoughtful.

He had received a letter from his Mamma in reply to the one he had sent her. It was written by Don Salvatore but it was a lovely letter and it made him cry. She had said that she knew of his theft but that the Spadinis had forgiven him and that they had treated her like one of the family. She had written also that she felt much better and that she was nearly cured, thanks to the Spadinis. Also she hoped to see him shortly at Collefiore, where she was sure he could find work. And then also she was glad that he was going to pay back the stolen money.

Mingo repeated by memory certain passages of that letter. He felt great joy but

there was a certain drawback—his father! There was no news concerning him.

At that moment, whether Giacomo, knowing of the letter received, wanted to distract him, or he wished to talk, it is difficult to say. Anyway he awoke Mingo from his dreams by a slap on his head.

"You are becoming a saint again, always wrapt up in your thoughts," he said.

The boy smiled and rubbed the spot that was struck.

"What's the matter with you?" Giacomo asked.

"Nothing."

"Nothing? What do you want? Your mother is better. Your father—well, you will see that he will write soon. The workmen like you better than before. What do you want, anyway? If you wish that they become friends, true friends, you must become good and willing, yes—but something else, lively. A workman also has his troubles but he likes people who can make him forget them. And he always looks upon the younger men and boys to give him joy,

boys like you. But get my pipe—no! in the other pocket, ninny—ah!”

He lit his pipe and continued:

“Yes, you must be lively—that is if you are not sick. I try to be happy—but tell me, can you sing?”

Mingo shrugged his shoulders.

“Can you sing, yes or no?”

“When I worked in the forest picking up twigs, yes—but—”

“Then you can sing. Do you sing well?”

Mingo began to remember some of his happy days.

“When we gathered the olives,” he said, “I always started the songs and the others followed me. Oh! how pretty were those songs we sang!”

“Come along! sing one of them.”

“No, Signor Giacomo.”

“Why not?”

“To tell the truth I feel ashamed to sing.”

“You are really a strange kind of kid! You are ashamed? Why?”

He looked at the boy with a mocking



He lit his pipe and continued, "Yes, you must be lively."

smile. Then he slapped him on the knee and said:

“How proud of your voice you are! Come along! You make me laugh. At least try.”

The boy tried to defend himself, to save himself. He feared that the other workmen would hear him and that they would make fun of him.

“Did you hear what I said?” insisted Giacomo. “Sing lowly—only for me. What do you know? Something lively of course. Can you sing something lively?”

And Giacomo began to work and he sang in a low voice.

Mingo did not know what to do. His heart beat like that of a tenor making his first effort on the stage. He tried to recall his old songs but they would not come back. Finally he began softly:

“My love is in the mountains, la la! la la!”

Giacomo encouraged him: he sang the air with him. The others heard the music and they joined in. It went along and every

workman began to sing. Then Mingo raised his voice higher:

"How beautiful you are, the sun hides his face before you!"

The others all sang and there was a grand chorus of song.

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It was really a triumph for Mingo! When the whistle blew the last hour of work, and the workmen left their places and went out of the gate laughing and singing, Giacomo and Mingo were surrounded.

"Who started that song?"

"Mingo?" Giacomo replied.

Other voices were heard:

"What did you give him to sing?"

"Hurrah for the boy from the mountains!"

"Hurrah for the potato-eater!"

"The bear woke up at last."

"Why didn't you sing before?"

Mingo replied:

"Because I was sleeping, I suppose."

They caught hold of him, carried him aloft

and tossed him about as if he were a rag-bag, singing, yelling and making all kinds of noises. If it had not been for Giacomo they would have smothered him with affection.

"Did they hurt you?" the under-foreman asked.

"Oh, no!"

"Go, and a good night's rest to you, you dear boy."

To Mrs. Cogliati and to her husband who had returned from another trip he had to tell what had happened that day.

His voice trembled as he told them, and as they wanted to hear a song he sang for them. They wanted to hear another and even they began to sing with him. Sometimes he forgot the words but Mr. Cogliati remembered them and the songs finished satisfactorily.

Yes, Mingo had found himself at last. Oh! how happy he was! And how he wanted to give some of his joy to his mother! He wrote her that very night a letter, a long letter—six pages!

CHAPTER XIX

GRADUALLY the work on the bridge and on the trolley line came to an end. Every day people came from far and near to see the great results that had been accomplished. Mr. Cogliati was always at Rivo-chiaro and watched personally with his co-partner the finishing touches.

Every day they expected to see the father of Mr. Cogliati who was head of the firm. The workmen began to bet on the day when the bridge and the trolley line would be handed over to the Government.

"It will take twenty days more," some of them said.

"Yes, at least a month," others replied.

"You're all crazy," said one. "It's ready now."

"If you think so, let us see," said another.

Mingo was asked what he thought and he did not know how to reply.

"Mr. Cogliati knows really the exact date," he said.

"Did he say that?"

"No."

"And Mrs. Cogliati—does she know?"

"All I can say is that Mr. Cogliati is contented and often rubs his hands."

"That means the bridge will be handed over some days before the contract is due."

These discourses were in this vein when a new thing happened.

Two wicked new men were employed as workmen. Tall, stout; one with light hair; the other dark. They spoke Italian badly. Who were they? Where did they come from? And how was it possible that the foreman, Lordevi, took them on when the work was nearly finished?

A mason said that he saw these two men near the station talking to the foreman. Mingo gave his opinion that the foreman would do nothing to hurt the Company. But as the others insisted that something was wrong he held his tongue. The other workmen however were curious and they

asked these two new ones many questions. But they were never answered.

* * *

Mingo became curious. The nice letters he received now, written by Mrs. Spadini in the name of his mother, he read with joy and he replied immediately. They were sent in care of Mr. Cigliati because that member of the firm had taken Mingo into his private service. Mingo was curious about these two new men.

Here is the reason.

One evening, after supper, he was obliged to go to the drug-store some distance away because the children needed medicine. The store was closed but he knocked at the door and insisted that he should be served. When he returned he took a short cut and under a tree in the moonlight he suddenly saw three men. He recognized immediately the foreman Lordevi on account of his felt hat with the large brim. The other two were the new workmen. Mingo stopped and hid behind



Under a tree in the moonlight he saw three men.



the tree. From there he thought he could hear what they were saying.

Here was a mystery!

Before the other workmen these two were always silent and they showed great respect to Lordevi. And why? To hide their friendship with him? And why did they do that?

Mingo was not able to hear distinctly what was said but he was surprised that they now spoke Italian very well.

He went on his way, and when the pains of the children grew less he went to bed.

But what dreams he had!

* * *

The day after was Sunday and no one worked. Mingo stayed with the children and he had the task of persuading them to take a dose of castor oil. Mrs. Cogliati was surprised at his success for she could not have done that. Then he had to try to console Anna, who cried nearly every day because Mrs. Cogliati was going to leave that part of the country. Not only that, but he

had to console the owner of the restaurant, "The New Bridge," for in a short time he would have no patrons. Mingo went to see him.

At one of the tables were seated the two new workmen. One shuffled a pack of dirty cards; the other was drinking wine.

The one who was drinking, after a nod of his companion, called Mingo, and taking him by the arm made him sit down at his side. He offered the boy a glass of wine.

Mingo would not drink.

They both questioned him about many things. The boy replied cautiously because he thought there was something wrong about them. Why was it they could not speak good Italian in the day time and only when there was moonlight could they speak correctly and distinctly? As they were polite and kind he stayed with them more than an hour.

CHAPTER XX

TWO weeks of feverish work passed by and one morning Mingo spread the notice that was looked for. On Thursday the work would be finished, on Friday there would be a banquet for the workmen and on Saturday wages would be paid. Sunday would be the day of inauguration.

Old Mr. Cogliati had arrived. He was tall, stout, with a long white beard and dressed in black. He always was accompanied by his grand-children. He went among the workmen, he shook them by the hand and offered them cigars. It is difficult to say whether the men preferred the hand-shake to the cigars. He told them that as the bridge would be finished on Thursday, the company was willing to pay another week's salary because they had worked so well. Of course the men cheered their old employer.

One day, at noon, the workmen gathered round Giacomo.

"We have got to be polite on the day of the banquet," they said to him.

"Don't you want to?" asked Giacomo.

"Well—would it offend you if we refuse?"

"Look here!" said Giacomo. "We are offered a dinner, we get another week's pay without work. What are we going to offer? They have all been kind to us. Mr. Cagliati, the son, has always treated us well. We won't speak of the father for he is like one of us—"

"That's true."

"You talk well."

"Go on, Giacomo."

"Listen then," said the under-foreman. "Of course we can't spend much, but there are a lot of us, and a few pennies will make a good sum. A large bunch of flowers ordered from the city, an album with all our names and a photograph of us all taken together—well, that won't cost much. What do you think?"

The idea was applauded and Giacomo was given the order to take care of everything.

“Sunday morning, when the inauguration is finished, one of us—”

“You, you!” the others cried.

“I don’t care. One of us will present the flowers, the album and the photograph. But keep quiet. Let’s make it a surprise.”

Mingo was very happy to hear all this. But what gave him the greatest joy was that in a few days he could pay to Mr. Spadini the hundred lire he had stolen. In a few days now he would see his mother and little brother. It seemed to him like a dream. He had just put aside all his small change, and Mr. Cogliati had given him a new clean bill of a hundred lire for it because he thought it would look better to return the money that way.

Mamma had written him again. Poor Mamma! How she had suffered for him! But now everything was over! He would return like the old Mingo, with head high and with a smile on his lips. Ah! if Papa

were only home! But there was no news from him although Mr. Spadini had telegraphed the Italian consul in the United States.

Next Monday! Mrs. Cogliati! Her husband! Anna! The children! Giacomo! He was sad that he would have to say goodbye to them.

CHAPTER XXI

THE farewell banquet was given and it was a grand success. At first there was that feeling of respect between men of finance and workmen, but it soon passed away because the heads of the firm knew how to throw themselves into the life of workmen. When fruit was served Mr. Cogliati thanked *his workmen* because it was *they who had built the bridge*. When he praised the working class, the enthusiasm was let loose and the men became delirious with their applause. He was surrounded, flowers were thrown at him and one old workman embraced him as if he were his son.

Then old Mr. Cogliati spoke. He said that his father was a bricklayer and he earned in those days thirty cents a day. His grandfather was also a mason and even he had carried on his shoulders loads of

bricks. In his blood, he said, after that there was lime and mortar. The workmen carried him around the room in their arms.

And Mingo? With all this applause and merriment he had nearly lost his head. Somehow he found himself between the two new workmen. Giacomo had not thought of him perhaps. From time to time he showed he was not pleased with them.

Slapping him on the shoulder one of them said:

“What’s the matter with you? Come on! Let’s have fun. Perhaps you are accustomed to have gentlemen next to you when there is a banquet.”

Mingo did not reply because at that moment someone spoke about “potato-heads,” and he laughed heartily. He was so interested that he did not see the man next to him fill his glass with wine, and not knowing he drank it.

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When the dinner was over the guests returned home. It was near sundown. The

waiters began to clear away the tables. Mnigo, who never drank wine, felt the effect of it and he sat in a corner of the room half-sleeping. One of the two new workmen went to him and in his half sleeping state forced him to drink another glass. The other smiled. After a few minutes they took him by the arm and led him to the forest.

Mingo felt that something was wrong inside of him. He started to sing so as to wake himself up. But the others told him to keep quiet.

The weather meanwhile became threatening. The sky which was before dotted with trembling stars was now covered by a thin transparent cloud. A cold wind came from the sea, animating the forest. There was not a voice to be heard. The only sounds were the rustling of the leaves and the breaking of the waves on the rocks.

Suddenly where the narrow pass met the mule path, from behind a large oak trunk a head appeared. If Mingo had been look-

ing he would have recognized Lordevi the foreman.

The man who was called Carlo still held Mingo by the arm and they walked on together. The other, Mario, stopped to lace his shoe: that is, he gave that reason for not following the other two. A little beyond, Carlo and Mingo sat down. They remained there a few minutes when Mario, who had talked to the foreman, joined them.

"Chilly, isn't it?" Carlo said.

"Yes, and it's growing dark," added the other.

"What did we come here for?" asked Mingo.

He started to get up but the others held him down.

"I really must go," he said. "At the house Mr. Cogliati is waiting for me. The door is not locked until I return."

The others were glad to learn that the door was not locked and they urged the boy to talk.

In a short time he did speak of Mrs. Cog-

liati, the children and of the kind way he had been treated.

"I shall be sorry to leave them," he said.
"Tomorrow I shall pack my few clothes."

"Who knows how many lire will be paid out tomorrow?" asked Carlo.

"I don't know," replied Mingo frankly.
"But Mr. Cogliati has many of them in the safe hidden—"

Carlo broke in, "Hidden where?"

The boy shrugged his shoulders:

"What business is that of ours?"

The conversation stopped. Mingo became suspicious. The others tried again.

"Well, where is the safe hidden?"

The boy shook his head and he was about to express imprudently his suspicions; but he understood in time and he said, forcing a smile:

"It seems to me that we have no more to say. Let's go. It's late and it's going to rain shortly. I have already felt a few drops."

He repeated the act of getting up but

the others again obliged him to sit down. What were the intentions of these two rogues? What did they want with him? Did they trust to his helping them?

"I'm going," he said resolutely in a loud voice. He sprang up but the others followed him. Mario caught hold of his arm and said:

"Listen, friend, you are a serious boy—"

"And honest," added Mingo, trying to pull himself away.

"With you, one can speak plainly," said the designing Carlo. "You were not born yesterday."

"You're not rich," said Mario. "You are a poor workman like us. We're going to give you the chance of making a neat little sum. Why should you refuse that? There is no danger. One word only and you will make fifty lire."

Mingo trembled. Perspiration came out on his forehead, but he felt strong in his heart. He thought he would play the part of being cunning.

"Oh! if I can make fifty lire without



The two rogues, taken by surprise, rushed at him.



danger—but let's hurry. Don't you feel the rain?"

"No, you don't," Carlo said, as Mingo tried to wriggle away.

But the boy with a supreme effort freed himself and started to run, crying:

"Thieves! Robbers! Help! Help!"

The two rogues, taken by surprise, rushed at him, and before he could go very far they caught him, threw him on the ground and were on top of him. But a voice from another part of the forest cried: "Who calls for help?"

The two men did not leave Mingo. They pinned his arms and legs to the ground and stopped his mouth firmly.

A moment or two passed.

"Where is the safe hidden? We're not going to hurt you. No one will ever know. We'll give you one hundred lire. Answer. Where is it?"

"I don't know," replied Mingo under the hand that pressed his mouth.

"Tell us," said Carlo. "Tell us for

your own good. Hundred lire for only one word."

"No," replied Mingo again.

"We'll give you two hundred."

"No, no, never!" cried Mingo through his teeth.

"Break his head," said Mario.

"Listen," Carlo tried again. He took a pistol out of his pocket and raised the trigger. "Decide, but hurry. We'll give you three hundred lire. Either three hundred lire or we'll shoot you."

"Kill me," replied Mingo with a thread of voice, "I'll never tell you."

"Oh, you brat!"

At that moment not far away there was the sound of two voices and the shot of a revolver.

The two rogues held their breath. But the voices died away and there was nothing to be heard except the monotonous patterning of the rain on the leaves. One of them took a handkerchief from his pocket, bound it tightly about the mouth of Mingo, then

with a piece of twine tied firmly his hands and feet.

When they were assured that he could neither move nor shout, they got up, looked towards the place from where the voices had come, sneaked cautiously in the other direction and disappeared.

The rain meanwhile drenched the poor body of Mingo.

CHAPTER XXII

WHEN Mr. Cogliati returned from the station whither he had accompanied the director of the railroad, with whom the contract for the bridge had been made, the evening was far advanced.

In the small dining room at the table Mrs. Cogliati was going over the accounts which she had kept for her husband with diligence and praiseworthy exactness. Old Mr. Cogliati was yawning in an armchair. That grandfather, when the children were not about, was always annoyed. But the children had been put to bed earlier than usual that evening.

"Did you bring the papers?" the father asked the son.

"Yes, here they are."

And old Mr. Cogliati began to scan over the head-lines.

In the last few days the younger Mr. Cog-

liati did not have a minute of rest. He grumbled to himself now on account of the weather which threatened to ruin the holiday tomorrow.

"Is everything all correct?" he asked his wife, looking at the account.

"Yes, everything. Sit down and I will prepare a light supper for you."

"Wasn't that soup we had today at the feast terrible?" yawned the elder Cogliati.

"What can you expect so far away from town," the son replied. "But where's Mingo?"

"He has not come back yet."

In the silence that enveloped the country the noise of a carriage was heard. It stopped before the door of the house. Two men were heard talking. Mr. Cogliati raised his head and his wife went to the window, but it was so dark she could not distinguish anything.

Someone knocked lightly upon the door.

"Who is it?"

"Friends."

The three looked questioningly at each

other. The elder Mr. Cogliati opened the door.

"What do you want?"

"Great goodness! Don't you recognize me?"

"Really?—But—Ah! it is you! It is you! Who would imagine it?—You, here! Embrace me, old friend. Ah! what a happy surprise! Son, this is my old college chum—Salvatore Santucci—embrace him. This is my son Edward, Salvatore, and this is my daughter-in-law. Oh! what a surprise, what a beautiful surprise! But, God bless you, why didn't you let me know? Coming in this rain? And at your age. You hold your own pretty well. Embrace me."

Don Salvatore was touched with such a cordial reception.

"Are you wet?" Mrs. Cogliati asked.

"Of course he is. Why didn't I think of it? Poor fellow! Wet as a drowned chicken. Hurry, daughter, bring him one of my suits and prepare a glass of hot wine. No? Hot milk then. Well! Well! how glad I am to see you!"

"Listen," said Don Salvatore, "I am a little wet but I was able to protect myself with my umbrella, and Mr. Spadini's coachman covered my knees with the horse-blanket. Please, I beg you, think more of him and of the horse which is not accustomed to such a long drive."

"Good, good, Edward will help him. Come change your clothes. Come! There's no ceremony here. My clothes are large for you but that won't matter. Oh! what a happy surprise! Don't forget, daughter, hot milk with lots of sugar."

The horse was dried, a bed was made for him and the manger was filled with hay. The driver Tonio also changed his clothes, putting on a hunting suit of Mr. Cogliati's.

Later, while Tonio consoled himself in the kitchen before a large dish of macaroni, Don Salvatore drank hot milk and persuaded his hosts that he could not put more into his stomach. He became enthusiastic, moved and satisfied, and every now and then he would say, "Is it really true that I see you again? After so many years! Thank

goodness, I love you as I did in the old college days."

But when a pause in the conversation arrived, Don Salvatore asked:

"Excuse me, but where is Mingo?"

"Really," said Mrs. Cogliati, "he ought to have been home some time ago. But there is no need to worry. This morning he was at the banquet and now he is enjoying himself with his friends. It is easy to understand, with this rain, that he is in someone's house. Do you know that he sings very well?"

"He is a good and fine boy," said the younger Mr. Cogliati.

"Yes, he is a good boy," echoed the father. He loves children, and when a boy loves children he can't be bad."

"He is not only good and fine, he is more than that," said Don Salvatore. "I have known him for some years and I know his history. It's a sad story, and it is a secret."

He smiled.

"And you won't tell us that story?"

No, not now. I want to see him—really I am worried. It is late. I do want to see him now.”

“He’ll come any moment.”

“But I want to tell him that his mother is coming Sunday. She is cured, thanks to Mr. Spadini. I hate to keep the glad news from him.”

“Tell us his story later,” said the elder Mr. Cogliati. “Do you remember our old chum Enrico at college—”

There was at that moment a loud knocking at the door. An excited voice that made them jump to their feet, cried:

“Mr. Cogliati! Hurry! The scaffolds are burning!”

The door was opened and there was the foreman.

“The fire has increased, the workmen are trying to put it out, the pumps are working—”

The younger Mr. Cogliati went out running. His wife wanted to follow but the father stopped her.

“You stay here,” he said. “Your place

is with the children. Don Salvatore will keep you company."

"No, I can't," said Don Salvatore, who took up his hat and cane. "I'm old, I know, but I can do my bit, too."

The two old men went out. Mrs. Cogliati anxiously looked out of the window towards the bridge.

Long flames of fire flared up from the wood under the last arch, and impelled by the wind mounted to the parapet. The river, the huts, the hills were illuminated by a sinister red light that disappeared in great spirals of smoke and tinted with pale rose the large bridge which seemed to defy the flames.

Before the arch and on the bridge were black shadows that seemed to come from everywhere. No one heard laments of any kind. All that was heard was the voice of the younger Mr. Cogliati, the crackling of the flames, the exhaust of the pumps.

The elder Mr. Cogliati was among the workmen in shirtsleeves and with eyes anxiously strained. Don Salvatore, leaning on



Suddenly two arms encircled her waist and a handkerchief closed her mouth.



his cane, tired himself in comforting and encouraging the men:

“Courage, boys! Defend what is yours.”

The order and the rapidity of their efforts were admirable. They seemed like parents who wanted to save their child from a monster.

Mrs. Cogliati looked at the fire, while twisting her hands and saying to herself:

“It’s our ruin! It’s our ruin!”

Suddenly two arms encircled her waist and a handkerchief closed her mouth. Mrs. Cogliati felt herself raised up and thrown on the floor, and a man above her held her arms and legs. He asked:

“Where is the safe? We are not going to harm you.”

But the poor woman, who tried to free herself, after a last effort became limp. They loosed the handkerchief and asked again:

“Where is the safe?”

There was no reply.

“She’s fainted,” said the one who held her hands. “She’s cold.”

They unloosened her apron and tied it over her mouth. After that they lit their dark lantern and looked around. They went into the other rooms. They saw the children sleeping.

"They can tell us," said one.

"No. They will scream," said the other.

They emptied the bureau drawers. They broke open a large box but they found only clothes. Then they saw a small steel box. They shook it and heard the sound of money and bills.

"We've got it."

A minute later two shadows climbed over the fence and disappeared into the darkness towards the river. Meanwhile the fire was being conquered.

CHAPTER XXIII

IT was after midnight and no one was sleeping. The emotions of the day had driven sleep away. Even Don Salvatore did not want to go to bed. He had been the first to help Mrs. Cogliati, and after seeing her comfortably fixed for the night he joined the elder Mr. Cogliati.

“She says that the robbers only stole the safe where we keep our money for daily expenditure.”

There were many workmen in the room and one of them asked:

“Did they steal a safe?”

“Yes. But the wrong one. The Company’s is hidden. But it might be that someone told them where it was.”

The workmen whispered among themselves:

“What did he say?”

“The fire was not a natural fire.”

"Some one started it."

"Have we been tricked by someone?" asked the younger Cogliati. "I can't believe that. It's foolish."

The under-foreman Giacomo stepped forward:

"Excuse me, but I think there is something wrong."

"Why?"

"Because, first of all, the fire must have something to do with the robbery. I think the robbers wanted to have all the men away from the house. What do you think?"

Mr. Cogliati did not reply.

"And then," continued Giacomo, "how can you explain the straw found on the scaffold?"

"Straw?"

"Yes, we saw it; yes, we saw it," the other men replied.

"I did not know that," said Mr. Cogliati twisting his moustache.

"And consider," said Giacomo, "the fire could not go on if there had not been some help. It was raining, you know that."

"There's more," said a youngster. "I did not see Mingo Grandi during the fire and I do not see him here! Who knows where he is?"

Mr. Cogliati became angry:

"You are right. Where is he? Has anyone seen him?"

Don Salvatore was a victim of indescribable excitement. The prolonged strange and mysterious absence of Mingo and the failure of the theft worried the old priest. An atrocious doubt began to work in his mind. Could Mingo enter into a thing of this kind?

But when the same doubt came from another he thought that wrong, and he said trembling and pale:

"Because Mingo is not here, do you think that evidence ought to condemn a good boy?"

The young man wanted to reply but Giacomo interrupted:

"No, Don Salvatore, we know him perhaps less than you do, but we all esteem and love him."

"Yes, yes," a few confirmed.

"I didn't accuse him," said the young workman, "God knows that. I only said that he was not here. Listen to what happened to me and another friend. A few hours ago after the banquet, we took a walk, and as it began to rain we came back by a short cut through the forest. It was dark, and going along we heard cries of, 'Thieves, thieves! Help, help!' We stopped. I cried out, 'Who wants help?' There was no reply. We listened but there was not a sound."

"And then?" asked anxiously the others.

"We waited for a few moments. Slowly we went to where we thought the cry came from and we listened again. The friend who was with me took out his revolver and shot in the air."

"But didn't you speak?"

"No, we thought some one was fooling. But come to think of it now, it seems to me that the voice that cried out 'Help' was the voice of Mingo."

A little later Mingo was found by a searching party. He was soaked to the skin, feverish, out of his mind. Two young men carried him to Mr. Cogliati's house.

He recognized no one. When he was put to bed in his delirious state he cried out: "No, I won't tell you. I won't tell you. Thieves! Thieves! Mr. Cogliati, run, run!" He did not come to his senses until nearly noon the day after. The police could then talk to him. He told them what had happened and the chief of police insisted upon questioning the foreman. But he, the author of the crime, had disappeared. Telegrams were sent everywhere and before the evening he was found.

Before going to sleep that night Don Salvatore went to Mingo. The boy, when he saw his old friend, frowned. He could not believe his eyes. But the priest spoke to him softly and lovingly; he praised him for what he had done, and he said finally:

"Mamma, Gino, and Mr. Spadini are coming here on Sunday."

"Really! No, it's not true."

"Yes, it is true. Mamma is cured and—"

"Oh! Don Salvatore, are they really coming here?"

"Yes, my dear boy. They are coming to embrace you, and celebrate as you deserve."

CHAPTER XXIV.

MR. COGLIATI'S alarm clock went off at half past four and Mingo, tired of twisting around on his mattress, got up and dressed himself quickly, although he felt weak. He opened the window.

The sky was cloudless. Venus and other stars tremblingly shone like large drops of dew about to fall. The sharp wind which had cleared the air in the night was still strong, but little by little it died away. Mingo was impressed by the loveliness of that morning.

"At this hour," he thought, "Mamma, Gino and Mr. Spadini have left Collefiore or they are about to leave."

He looked towards the bridge. The workmen were already putting up flags and making festoons with bunting.

Even that morning he wanted to finish his duties. Quietly he prepared the coffee

and cleaned the kitchen. Then he put on his bran-new suit.

"Oh yes! to-day I shall see Mamma and—I wonder will she bring little brother Ciccillo?"

But a thought troubled him. His mother was coming, but—

It was strange, this idea of his; but it can be explained.

He had for a long time looked forward to the moment when he could feel his mother's arms around him. That is true. But he had promised himself that he would not see her until he had paid back the money stolen, because he wanted to look at her with eyes clear and heart pure. Instead perhaps he would see her before he saw Mr. Spadini.

Oh! if only Mr. Spadini would come before his mother—but they were coming together. Mingo would have preferred to see him first, then his mother. Still, he said to himself, "I must be patient."

That day was the greatest day of all for the workmen. People came from every

part of the country. There was music, dancing, there was everything to make everybody happy. But Mingo stayed near the house all the time.

When Don Salvatore saw him he asked quickly:

“What’s the matter with you? You don’t look a bit happy. Come to my room.”

Then he spoke again:

“What is the matter with you? You can be frank with me. To-day is a holiday not only for the others but for you. You have suffered—I understand that—but, my dear boy, we all suffer in this world. You are a boy and you must forget the past and enjoy the present. You are beginning to live another life. You must be as you were some months ago.”

Mingo sighed:

“I want to see my mother but I want to see Mr. Spadini first.”

The priest looked at him, stirred to the depths of his heart.

“I understand, I understand,” he said. “Ah! you are a good, fine boy. You will

never fall again, I'm sure of that. In a short time they will be here, but trust me I shall help you. Before you can throw yourself into the arms of your mother you will first see Mr. Spadini."

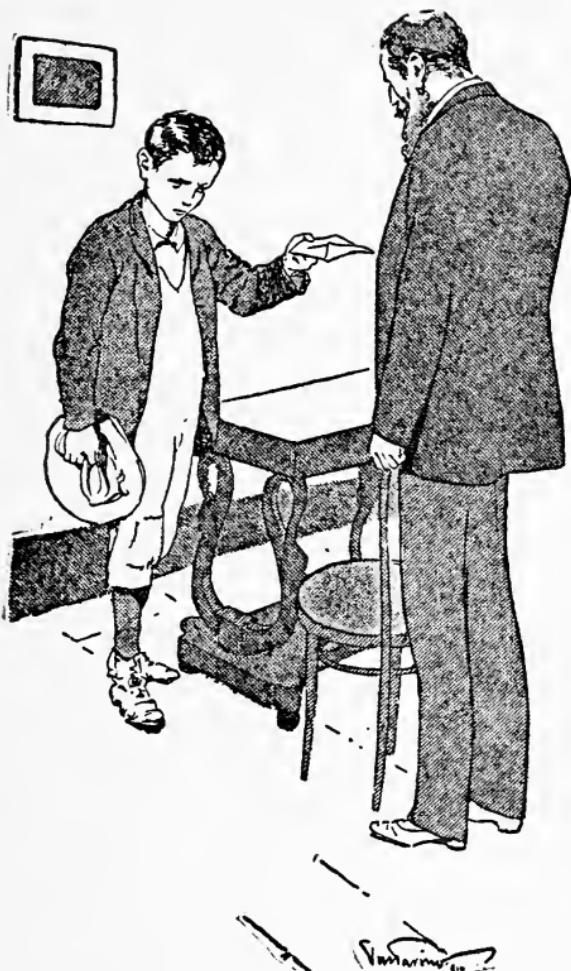
Just at that moment Mr. Cogliati called: "Don Salvatore, the visitors have come. I think Mingo's mother is with them."

The priest looked at the boy.

"You are trembling—why? I don't understand. Oh, yes, I do understand. Leave everything to me. First of all you will see Mr. Spadini. Is that all right? Now be strong and courageous as you have been all these months."

Of course Mingo wanted to be strong and courageous, and he tried to forget everything by looking out of the window. Then he heard footsteps. He looked around and saw Mr. Spadini.

"What do you want to say to me?" Mr. Spadini asked smiling. "How are you? It seems to me you are pretty well. Really, you have become a young man. Come with me, your mother is waiting for you."



*He put his hand in his pocket, drew out an envelope
and offered it to Mr. Spadini.*

Mingo trembled. He had thought many times of the moment when he could go before Mr. Spadini with the money paid back, and he had thought of the words he would say, but now he could not open his mouth. He put his hand in his pocket, drew out an envelope and offered it to Mr. Spadini.

Mr. Spadini took the envelope and without opening it said:

"I would like to refuse this. I would rather say, keep it for your family, but I know that would offend you. I would like to say, keep these hundred lire and—no! that would be an insult to you. Really, Mingo, you are a little gentleman."

The boy sobbed but he felt happy.

"Don't cry, Mingo. You ought to be proud of yourself. I have nothing more now to say to you. Oh! yes! I think I have hopes of finding your father. A friend of mine wrote me that he was ill. The Italian Consul wrote me from Philadelphia that he would look around for him in the hospitals. I did that for you as a gift to you. For my new electric mill I want some

one I can trust. I have thought of you, of your mother and father, and I'm going to give that place to your family. I can't do more than that. I have not told anyone as yet, but when you see your mother you can tell her."

Mingo threw himself down at the feet of Mr. Spadini who raised him immediately: "Give me your hand and don't cry."

But even Mr. Spadini had tears in his eyes, and also Don Salvatore, who heard the conversation near the door, had tears in his eyes.

"Come along, Mingo," the priest said. "Your mother is waiting."

Mingo went out of the room and two spasmodic cries were heard.

The priest went to Mr. Spadini.

"Wicked or unfortunate?" he asked with a sweet smile in his eyes.

Mr. Spadini smiled also and replied:

"Another time I shall be less severe."

"Not less severe but wiser."

How often he who steals has more want of pity and compassion than of justice?

CHAPTER XXV

ONE day a man poorly dressed walked along one of the streets of the city of Philadelphia. He carried in his hand a slip of paper on which was written the name of Captain Amilcar Levenati and the number of a house. As he passed a door he noticed that it was partly open. He looked up at the number and found that it corresponded with the one on the card. He rang the bell. As no one answered he rang again. He rang a third time, and receiving no reply he pressed open the door, saying, "May I enter?"

He went into the hallway but he did not know what to do. He heard the voices of children, which brought a melancholy smile to his lips. This man had just come out of a hospital where he had been some months. His face was wan, his eyes sunken and his beard untrimmed.

He heard the voice of a man say, "Maria, I think there is some one in the hall."

A woman appeared and seeing the wretched man drew back at first, then she asked, "Who are you? What do you want?"

The man had taken off his ragged hat and replied:

"Don't be afraid, Madam. I rang the bell three times—"

"Yes, it is broken," she interrupted.

"Excuse me, I'm looking for Captain Levenati, captain of the steamer *Adriatic*. I'm an Italian and a workman."

The captain at that hour did not want to be disturbed and the woman answered:

"My husband is not at home."

"Not home?" anxiously asked the man.
"Has he already gone to Italy?"

"No, he has not gone away. He sails next week."

The man trembled. He pressed his hand on his breast as if he were in pain. He breathed heavily. There was a chair in the

hall and the woman asked him to sit down, but he remained standing.

"I really would like to see the Captain. I'm an Italian and a workman. They gave me his address at the Hospital. When can I see him?"

The woman took pity upon the man and said:

"Wait a minute. Sit down."

She disappeared.

The man still remained standing and he pressed his hand over his brow. Though weakened by his illness he looked like a strong man with broad shoulders. At the end of the hall two curly-headed children spied round the corner and then drew back laughing. The captain came out of his office and stopped before the man. He was a tall man, bald, with a large black beard. He looked at the man and invited him into his office.

"Captain, I'm an Italian. Pardon me, but I have need of you. God preserve your children whom I heard a moment ago. I

also have two boys who are expecting me, and I want to see them. You are going to Italy on the *Adriatic*—”

“Excuse me, but they have given you the wrong directions. The *Adriatic* is a cargo ship and does not carry passengers.”

The man shook his head.

“Captain, I really have need of you. Where can I find money to pay for a passage? I had money once but I’ve been in the hospital so long that it’s all used up. Captain, please take me with you.”

“With me? What are you talking about?”

“Ah, Captain,” the man insisted, “please do this act of charity. Think of my wife and my boys who have not heard from me for many weeks. I have always behaved well. I am an honest workman but now I can’t work any more. At the hospital, they told me that I was cured, but it is not true. I feel as if I am going to die and I do want to see my wife and boys. Think of your children and how you would—”

“You ask me something,” interrupted the

Captain, "that I absolutely refuse to do. I cannot help you. I am not the owner of the *Adriatic*." And as if to dismiss him, he added, "I can't. That's all there is to it."

"And then I shall die like this, far away from my family without seeing them? Have compassion on a father. Take me in your service. Give me a little work, I don't care what it is. Give me bread and water only, let me sleep on deck, but take me to Italy. Do not drive me away like this. Have pity on me—on my boys—"

He broke into sobs with his face buried in his hat. The sight of those broad shoulders convulsed by sobs touched the Captain, but he scratched his eye-brow with his finger and said:

"No, I cannot. I cannot do a thing that is not permitted. If you wish I can help you in another way."

He put his hand in his trouser pocket.

The other raised his head and became a little angry:

"Alms to me? I have never begged, Captain. Do you think I'm one of those

common loafers? I'm not, I tell you." He smiled sadly. "Very well, I shall go away—I shall die without seeing them—I'm going."

He bowed and left the room, lightly closing the door.

The captain was surprised at such pride. He remained an instant in the middle of the room, shrugged his shoulders and sat down at his desk.

The workman stopped in the hall a moment as if to reflect clearly that all hope was lost. As he turned towards the front door a boy ran in singing. He was the captain's eldest son. When the man saw the boy he was struck with surprise. He gave a cry and ran to the boy and clasped his arms about him. The mother had seen what was taking place and she gave a cry of alarm. The captain rushed from the office and he saw the man on his knees with his son held tightly in a loving embrace.

The captain struck the man with his fist and the boy being liberated ran to his



"I shall die without seeing them—I'm going."



mother. The man was nearly knocked over but he held out his arms to the boy. Great sobs shook his body.

"He is like my little Mingo, he is the image of him, of Mingo, and I shall never see him again."

The captain understood and his wife felt tears running down her cheeks.

The man continued to call:

"Mingo! Mingo! Mingo!"

The boy looked at his mother. Then on the tips of his toes he went to the workman and stroked his head with his hand.

The man trembled. He raised his head and looked at the boy through his tears. Then he took his hand and pressed it to his lips with devotion.

Seven days later the father of Mingo Grandi left Philadelphia on the *Adriatic* for Italy.





